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FEB. 1954

23¢



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by Irving E. Cox Jr.

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SCIENCE FICTION Quarterly

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Feature Novelet

THE CHILDREN OF THON

by Irving E. Cox, Jr. 8

Dirrul had been told that the key to the mystery of Thon lay in the special meanings that these people had for the terms they used. And that it would be fatal to employ his own meanings for Thonian words — as he discovered!



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ROBERT W. LOWNDES, Editor

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A Department of Letters and Comment

As I Was Saying...

IRV COX'S use of semantics in our leadoff story reminds me that I've long been meaning to have at my worthy colleague. Mr. John W. Campbell, Jr., who recently declared Null-A to be dead in a tone reminiscent of Chuck Dressen on the Giants. Dressen was right in a limited sense; the Giants did lie down and expire this year, though next year it might be a different story—as Lester del Rey and other Giant supporters aver. And Campbell was right, too, in a limited sense. Null-A is dead insofar as its being the immediate salvation of humanity is concerned; although there was a time when Campbell and a number of other science-fictionists were talking as if Null-A were the answer to everything.

It's probably from this background that Campbell derived his assertion that Null-A claims that Aristotelian logic, in the sense of true-false logic, is false, misleading and entirely unacceptable. Actually, the cooler heads

among the semanticists not only made no such claim, but have consistently tried to calm down enthusiasts who did.

Null-A, you see, isn't merely a strict denial of A; the Non-Artistotelian systems (don't forget that plural there; there's more than one) include the Aristotelian, and one of the aims is to discover just where and when the Aristotelian is adequate.

There's a difference between asserting—as Null-A does—that *all* questions cannot be answered simply "yes" or "no", and asserting—as Campbell claims Null-A does—that *no* questions can be answered merely "yes" or "no". This argument completely ignores the fact that there are many different types of questions; it says in effect that a question is a question, and an answer is an answer, and an answer is either "yes" or "no".

On the mechanical level, this may
[Turn To Page 33]

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A relay-team of beautiful women took the torch from Dirrul's hand, to carry it across the field . . .



The mystery of Thon didn't seem to be too baffling; Dirrul had to uncover one traitor, that was all. And it was apparent where to look for that traitor — until Dirrul suddenly realized that he had completely overlooked one essential factor. But now it was too late . . .

THE CHILDREN OF THON

Novelet of Worlds to Come
by Irving E. Cox, Jr.

(illustrated by Don Sibley)

AS HIS SHIP moved out of the Orinian Cluster, Eddie Dirrul relaxed in his Cloud-foam chair, settling the robot-navigator for Agron. He was returning from his first assignment, the clarification of the Orinian commercial franchise, and he looked forward with intense pleas-

ure to making his report at the Air-command headquarters.

The saucer shape of the Galaxy glowed on the screen of the electronic star-map over his control board. Dirrul looked up at it and felt the familiar surge of pride. Someday, perhaps, he would take this symbol of the Rational Potential as a matter of course, the way many of the older ones did; but now he was still too new at the job. Space-pilot Dirrul, diplomat of the Planetary Union! He rolled the title on his tongue, savoring the pleasure.

Suddenly the robot-navigator snapped into neutral and Dirrul's ship throbbed with the insistent buzz of the alarm. The star-map telescoped to an enlargement of a space-sector on his port bow. The shimmering field of microscopic light reflected the silent violence of an air battle. Three darting, viciously-armed Space-dragons were attacking the lumbering bulk of a tourist cruiser.

Dirrul's own ship was an adaptation of the Space-dragon design, the fastest armed fighter in the Galaxy, to which the essential safety devices of the Agronians—and certain of their luxuries—had been added. On manual control, Dirrul's ship reached the scene of battle before the robot tele-ray had completed transmission of the alarm to Air-command headquarters.

The battered cruiser bore the insignia of the Thonian Packet Line, one of the registered excursion franchises of the Planetary Union. The attacking Space-dragons were Vininese, light years outside their own territory. The situation had all the makings of a nasty Intergalactic incident, for the Vininese Confederacy and the Planetary Union had been technically at peace for a quarter of a century, the Galaxy split between them. Even in the face of such aggression, the space police might have felt constrained to wait for instructions from Agron. But Dirrul was a space-pilot and the organization of the Air-command was,

by intention, so nebulous that the individual space pilot acted upon his own initiative.

With external armament blazing, Dirrul's ship spun toward the battle, cutting out one of the three Space-dragons. For the moment, initial surprise worked for him; he centered his sights on the ship and pulled the detonator. As the probing rays met and crossed on the surface of cold metal, the Space-dragon blazed briefly with white heat before it disappeared in a dark streak of collapsed atoms, electronless hydrogen nuclei.

Dirrul expected the other two Space-dragons to turn on him, and he was ready for the wracking contest of maneuver that would follow. To his surprise, the fighting-ships made an awkward, last-minute attempt to disintegrate the tourist cruiser. Both fired at once. Their beams met in space, harmlessly neutralizing each other. Then the Vininese Space-dragons turned tail and fled.

Instinctively, Dirrul wanted to pursue them; rationally, he knew it was more important to bring help to the shattered cruiser, on the slim chance that some of the passengers might still be alive. Avoiding the jagged holes torn in the third class cabins at the rear of the cruiser, Dirrul grappled his ship to the control room blister. Through the transparent dome he saw the pilot slumped over his control-board, his head smashed; but on the floor behind him a wounded cabin boy was crawling weakly toward the tele-ray emergency alarm. There was still air in the cruiser, then.

DIRRUL sealed the exit-chambers together and the machinery ground the locks open. He plunged into the cruiser. Aside from the cabin boy, there were two other first-class passengers alive. He carried all three into his ship, and cut the cruiser adrift, disintegrating it because the hulk was

too badly smashed for him to tow it back to Agron.

The cabin boy and one passenger were only superficially wounded, suffering largely from emotional shock. Dirrul administered a sleep-hypnotic, and put them to bed. The third victim was badly hurt. Dirrul carried him into his robot hospital-chamber, and fastened the plasma-feeder tubes into his veins, sealing the more obvious injuries with the sani-plastic caps. Normally, the treatment could have been expected to keep him alive until Dirrul delivered him to an emergency hospital on Agron.

Dirrul identified the cabin boy as Agronian, and the slim, blue-skinned, four-armed passenger as a tourist from Marginon; but the third man was a stranger. He bore a rough biological resemblance to Dirrul himself—but he was eight feet tall, magnificently built, and his skin was so transparent that his yellow veins and a pale gray web of nerves were clearly visible. He wore gem-encrusted blue sandals, and a skirted, yellow garment bound tight to his waist by a scarlet sash and flung loosely across one shoulder, so that much of his chest was exposed.

As the plasma-feeder pulsed fluid into his blood stream, the tall stranger opened his eyes and tried to rise, but could not.

"Take it easy," Dirrul said. "You'll be all right when I get you to Agron."

"You are Agronian?" The stranger's voice was a hoarse whisper, and he spoke very slowly, like a child feeling his way with an unfamiliar tongue.

"Yes; Space-pilot Dirrul."

The wounded man became very excited. "I have got through, then! You will bring help."

"Of course; but you can talk later. Now—"

"No; my time is ended." The tall man felt his chest. "My hurt is within here. Much broken and great pain." Vaguely he gestured toward the plas-

ma-feeder. "Your blood-food is not ours; it will do me no good."

"Tell me the chemistry," Dirrul said quickly. "I'll alter the formula."

"I do not know it. My people have not been catalogued by your scientists; it was the wish of our priests." Suddenly the tall man fell back against the Cloud-foam cushion, his face twisting with pain. "I am of Thon," he whispered. "The Space-dragons of Vinin tried to destroy the tourist ship because I was aboard; that I know. I would have gone to Agron to tell our need, to beg for help. They learned of it in some way. But you—you are a space-pilot. You take my message for me. You say to the Agronians—"

A spasm of pain shook the handsome Thonian, and he closed his eyes for a moment. When he spoke again his breath was coming faintly, in desperate gasps. "Go help my people!" Clumsily he tore a ring from his finger and pressed it into Dirrul's hand. "They—they will know you from this." His head slumped on his chest and he died.

The planet of Thon! If the Vininese were attempting to subvert its culture, Dirrul knew he must act at once. The Thonian sun-system was an independent unit within the Galactic territory of the Planetary Union. Relatively speaking, the sun was young; Thon, its only inhabited planet, was primitive, vigorous, immensely wealthy. Like every other planet in the Galaxy, Thon was protected by the Nuclear Beams of the Planetary Union; but beyond that the Thonians, by choice, had little contact with the higher technology of other peoples. Tourists were permitted to visit in the capital city, and the Thonian government-monopoly engaged in a one-way trade, but steadfastly refused to import either goods or ideas from other areas of the Planetary Union. The Governing Council would not force the issue, for a basic law of the Union

was that every people had a right to develop its concept of the Rational Potential in its own way.

Yet if the Vininese were infiltrating Thon, perhaps already bringing in their debilitating and enslaving wave-transmitters, the Planetary Union would be forced to intervene to save the Thonians. Not obviously, of course; the Governing Council could never sanction any violation of the Rational Potential, whatever the cause. It would be a job for some space-pilot of the Air-command.

SINCE HE was within a few hours of Thon, Dirrul knew that he should go to the Thonian capital and initiate the investigation. Later, if he found ground for suspicion, he might need help; but the important factor, as he interpreted it, was the element of time. If once the Vininese succeeded in establishing a transmitter on Thon, the planet was lost.

As a matter of routine, Dirrul began to teleray his decision to Air-command headquarters. Surprisingly, the transmitter went dead in his hand, and the cold emotionless voice of Colonel Marlan cut in, "Send nothing further, Space-pilot Dirrul. Report at once to headquarters."

"But that means the loss of two days, maybe three!"

"You must have preparation; without it you can do nothing. It's the chance we have to take. We're reasonably sure there is no transmitter on Thon now but our own, and we have no information that any Vininese space-fleet is moving into our territory. We've anticipated them; they're not ready to act yet; and tactically the Vininese are incapable of altering plans to meet an emergency situation. We still have a limited time on our side, Dirrul. We must use it wisely."

Thirty-six space hours later, Dirrul's ship landed at the Air-command port on Agron. Cadet trainees took

over his passengers, to record their stories of the Vininese attack on the tourist cruiser. Because the Air-command was handling the investigation—rather than the Thonian Packet Line or the Excursion Insurance Monopoly—Dirrul realized that the incident would be handled carefully, to satisfy the survivors without publicity. There would be no diplomatic representation made to Vinin. Obviously, then, the Air-command was taking a serious view of the episode; that could only mean they had more information than Colonel Marlan had implied.

Dirrul bathed at the space-pilot reception lounge, and put on a dress uniform. Skin-tight, conservatively cut, it was a quiet gray, totally devoid of insignia except for the gold rocket-spheres stamped into the twin points of the collar. It was the sort of uniform that would pass entirely unnoticed among the spectacularly-dressed crowds in the Agronian capital. Such lack of ostentation was symbolic of the function of the Air-command, the unsung judicial, military, and diplomatic arm of the government of the Planetary Union. Originally planned by the philosophers of the Union, and still directed by the faculty of the Ad-air University, the air-command was carefully recruited, exhaustively trained, deliberately indisciplined, functioning beyond the verbalization of the law in order to preserve the spirit of it.

A young cadet admitted Dirrul to the office of Colonel Marlan. The Colonel was a vigorous, gray-haired man, well past the prime of life. His title was honorary, primarily useful as a matter of convention, since it was the Colonel who signed the release for any information that the Air-command chose to publicize; and the position was annually elective. The Colonel's real job was that of Dean of the Graduate School in Psycho-biology at the Ad-air University. He greeted Dirrul warmly, motioning him into the

Cloud-foam lounge beside the desk.

"I'VE ALREADY briefed myself with your robot-log," the Colonel explained. "Now let me fill in the background for you."

"The Vininese are making a play for Thon?"

"We're not sure, Dirrul. You understand the arrangement about the Beams. We've given the device to any people who ask for it, including the Vininese, with no strings attached. No planet has ever been coerced into joining the Planetary Union, and three or four sun-systems in our half of the Galaxy have chosen to be independent. Thon is one, and very probably the Thonian hierarchy made their decision wisely. Thon is a very young planet; by our standards, the Thonians are a primitive people, centuries behind the kind of culture the Earth-people have given us with the Rational Potential. If we were to force our concepts and our technology upon them too rapidly, their adjustment might be impossible; we would destroy them instead of helping them. We have built the Beam stations on Thon in order to protect the planet from Vininese enslavement; but there our penetration ceases. It is in the agreement, and we will never violate it."

"But if the Vininese erect a wave-transmitter on Thon—"

"It is up to us to make sure they don't. Now this adventure of yours, Dirrul—the Thonian who was coming here for help—it has been duplicated on three other occasions, with similar results. Twice we have had interrupted teleray messages from Thon requesting our assistance."

"And we've done nothing?"

"All we could. The Governing Council has requested permission to send an Ambassador; so far, the Thonians have not replied. We've done nothing out of the ordinary. Recently we've had rumors of unrest

among the Thonian barbarians. So far as we know, the request for help may have come from them; Vininese agents may be fomenting the trouble—which is what I strongly suspect. But our hands are tied, unless the whole people ask for our intervention. This may simply be a Thonian revolution. If it is, we can't intervene; the Thonians must learn to solve the problem of war for themselves. The Rational Potential cannot be imposed from the outside; it comes only from a self-conscious understanding."

"The Vininese are dabbling on Thon," Dirrul declared firmly. "They were Vininese ships that attacked the tourist cruiser."

"Circumstantially, we have a case," the Colonel admitted. "Someone on Thon wants our help; but the messages never get through. They try coming to us in person, and the tourist-cruisers are destroyed by Vininese Space-dragons. However, the Thonian government has not officially requested our assistance; and our own commercial travelers consistently report nothing amiss on Thon. For all we know, this may simply be an instance of Vininese piracy, which can be settled through ordinary diplomatic channels once we're sure that's all it is."

The Colonel folded his hands on his desk, and looked Dirrul in the eye. "I want you to go to Thon."

"I was hoping you'd give me the job," Dirrul said.

"The Air-command doesn't give assignments," Colonel Marlan replied quickly and with disapproval. "You're new with us, Dirrul, and I dare say you must still learn our ways."

"A question of semantics," Dirrul said. "What I meant was, I hoped you'd consider allowing me to—"

"I don't do the considering, my friend; you do that for yourself. You know the problem; you understand yourself better than I do. If you feel that you can accomplish what needs

to be done, take charge of the situation. Otherwise, we'll canvass the other space-pilots in port until we find our man."

"Thank you, sir."

"Sir?" the Colonel repeated, frowning. "More semantic difficulty, I suppose? My friend, *sir* implies a relationship of inferiors to superiors; it is highly inappropriate to a space-pilot."

Then he smiled. "I've arranged for you to go to Thon as the replacement agent for Agron Metals. They hold the largest trading franchise with the Thonians, and as agent you'll be most likely to be accepted without question by the Thonian government. But remember, Dirrul, many of the facilities you have in the Union as a space-pilot will not be available on Thon."

"You'll be on your own entirely. Even in an emergency, we can't give you much help. It's the kind of situation that calls for quick thinking and mature reaction to unpredictable stimuli."

The Colonel pushed back his chair and shook hands again. "You'll go in the regular agent's lux-yacht; I believe he's expected to land on Thon within the next two space-days; that doesn't leave you much time. I'd suggest you check with Dr. Kramer on Thonian linguistics; and fill in a background on the history of the people, too, if you can."

2



DIRRUL LEFT the Colonel's office under the impression that he should make careful preparation for his mission to Thon; but when he turned the question over in his mind he found nothing to prepare for. A prob-

lem existed—perhaps. Yet, as it was stated, there were too many unknowns. The question might have been reduced to algebraics—but the solution would have been algebraic as well, with an infinity of possible variants. The only tangible fact he possessed was the ring given him by the dying Thonian, an ornament intricately wrought in soft gold; and quite meaningless. Nonetheless, it might prove useful. Dirrul slipped it over the knuckles of his index finger.

He waited for Dr. Kramer outside the lecture room. The little, fat professor was overjoyed to see him, since it was Kramer who had nursed Dirrul through the explosive period of his training as a space-pilot cadet. They went to the University lounge to talk. Kramer listened patiently while Dirrul explained what he knew of the situation on Thon. Then, folding his tiny hands over the pouch of his stomach, the professor said, "Like so many other problems, this one can be reduced to a question of language."

Dirrul laughed. "If you could, you'd describe the universe as a law of semantics, wouldn't you?"

"And what else is it, Edward? Does a thing or an idea exist if it cannot be described? When you describe, you communicate. When you communicate, you use some form of language—a term, a number, a symbol, an equation. Therefore, language is the prime-mover in all things; the Earthmen taught us that when they gave us the concept of the Rational Potential."

"That all sounds very pretty in a lecture, Dr. Kramer. Let's apply it specifically to Thon."

"The Thonians, Edward, are a primitive people. Your superior knowledge and techniques could transform you into a species of God on Thon, but you will be among a race of beautiful children. To save them from the Vininese you must learn to understand them, as they understand themselves. Take a hypno-teacher on your

ship with you and, before you land, learn two things: first, their language; second, their history. When you finally understand the problem there and go about solving it, state your solution in their terminology—Thonian words with Thonian meanings."

"It doesn't sound hard, Dr. Kramer."

"On the contrary, it's the most difficult thing an intelligent person can try to do. It means you have to think from their point of view, rather than your own. They may have a term for *space*—to cite one example. Even in your own thinking, you cannot translate their symbol into a meaning you have when *you* use the term. With more abstract and emotive words, the difficulty multiplies. Don't forget it. If you do, your mission will end in failure and tragedy—tragedy both for yourself and for the children of Thon."

"You're still talking generalities, Dr. Kramer."

"No, Edward! I'm being entirely specific, if you understand what I mean. You'll discover that for yourself before this is over, I expect. Remember, on Thon you're dealing with a primitive society about which our general records are very incomplete, because these people have not permitted us to study their ways. In such a situation one truism usually applies. A man who speaks with meanings that are evident pattern-growths from his own past may be a mediocrity, a saint, or a bitter personal enemy. But one thing he cannot be is a traitor to himself or his heritage."

Smiling, the professor fingered the food-selector dial on their table. "Now let's put aside your business for a moment, Edward. They've developed a wonderful new Safe-sweet confection here; I want you to try it." Dr. Kramer pushed a button; the slot shot open and the delicacy slid out on the table before them.

DIRRUL departed for Thon at sunset. He set out from the hidden Air-command spaceport on the University campus. It was Colonel Marlan's idea for him to leave in secret, since it was probable that Vininese agents were on Agron, and it would be creating obstacles to permit Vinin to learn that a space-pilot was being sent to Thon.

Dirrul exchanged his quiet space-pilot's uniform for the glittering, jeweled scarlet worn by the commercial traveler. He carried complete, painstakingly-forged papers identifying him as an Agent, First Class, of Agron Metals, Inc.

"Bear one fact in mind," Colonel Marlan said as he shook hands with Dirrul. "Under no conditions are you to interfere in the local affairs of Thon. You are there to find a Vininese agent, if any, and to bring him back here—preferably alive. If you need help, we'll send you what we're permitted to, legally; don't count on much."

Dirrul shut the airlock and set the robot-navigator for Thon. As the luxury yacht soared beyond the Agronian stratosphere, he clamped the helmet of the hypno-teacher over his head, and relaxed in the comfort of the Cloud-foam lounge.

He mastered the Thonian language first; then he put the reels of history and legend into the machine.

Thon, he learned, was a very young planet, the outermost satellite of a brilliant sun, and the only inhabited planet in its system. The Thonian civilization had evolved less than fifty thousand years past the portal of primitive self-awareness. Thon was immensely rich in countless raw materials, but only a small part of the planet close to the equator was inhabited; the rest was given over to jungle, towering mountain ranges, and slowly-receding glacial caps.

The center of Thonian civilization was on the shore of a salt sea, called the Thundering Water; it was an agricultural economy clustering around the capital city of Walthea. Beyond the Praelonium of Walthea—apparently a synonym for Kingdom—were a number of unorganized, warlike tribes of barbarians, more or less constantly at war with the Waltheans. All Thonians were of one racial stock, with a common religion and language; their conflict seemed cast in the pattern of the classic struggle between the haves and the havenots. The Waltheans held off the barbarians in a variety of ways: some tribes were bribed to keep the peace, others were pacified with grants of citizenship status, but the great majority were kept in check by Walthean border guards. Every able-bodied male in the Praelonium was liable for periodic military service.

The Thonians lived simply; the material development of their science was negligible. In abstract sciences, however—mathematics, law and philosophy—they were surprisingly mature. Any man on the street felt fully-qualified to express an opinion. The Thonians took immense pride in literacy. They scorned luxury and any form of art which struck them as ornate or purely decorative. They were passionately serious in most things—as a result of which they had no forms of amusement, no drunkenness, no record of immorality—and, apparently, no sense of humor.

DIRRUL landed at the Walthean spaceport late in the afternoon. It was a fenced enclosure located south of the capital city, the low, white buildings of which lay close to the shore of the Thundering Water. There were no industries on Thon, except for the distant jungle mines maintained by Agron Metals, and the air was crystal-clear. Glittering in the

bright, orange-yellow sunlight, the city was like a string of jewels cradled on the yellow velvet of the turf, and set off by the glaring green of the sea.

The spaceport had been built by Agronians when the Planetary Union first set up Nuclear Beams on Thon, and the square tower of the Transmitter Building stood at one corner of the port next to the Thonian Customs House. At first, both the field and the Transmitter had been manned by Agronian volunteers; but in recent months they had been entirely replaced by locally trained Thonian crews, at the specific request of the Thonian government.

It was a policy futilely opposed by the Air-command. Thon intended to prohibit all import of outside knowledge and invention, which was their privilege. Yet, the government was inconsistent enough to believe that Thonians could be taught to service the spaceport and the Transmitter—without at the same time being exposed to other technology of the Planetary Union. It wouldn't work; Dirrul knew that. The Thonians wanted to build a dam against too-sudden progress, but they had deliberately weakened its foundations. The inevitable clash of cultures was predictable; it might be very ugly when it came.

There was a great deal of activity on the field. A large Thonian Packet Line tourist cruiser had just landed, and the passengers were being gently herded into the customs logia. Further on, five huge freighters were being loaded by the Agron Metals conveyor, and a sixth was warming up its ancient atomic-powered motors, preparing for departure. Amid such confusion, Dirrul expected to land without fanfare; but apparently the agent for Agron Metals was something of a personage in Walthea.

As soon as he presented his papers at the customs counter, there was an excited scurrying among the inspec-

tors; a delegation of officials came from a reception-room to greet Dirrul and escort him to a waiting, flower-decked wagon which was drawn by six massive, fur-skinned beasts of burden. The Thonians resembled the man Dirrul had taken from the smashed tourist cruiser. Transparent-skinned, they were all eight or nine feet tall and beautifully formed, dressed in loose, sheet-like garments that left the upper parts of their bodies nearly naked. A dignified, elderly man took Dirrul's hand as he climbed into the wagon, introducing himself as the Chief Thonar of Thon; the others in the delegation were the Conthonars, a kind of advisory council to the ruler. The carriage moved along a dirt road toward the city of Walthea, among spectators who lined the stone walks.

"You're new here," the Chief Thonar said. "Does that mean that Agent Halman will not be returning to Walthea?"

"I'm simply substituting while he takes a vacation leave."

"It probably puzzles you, then, that the entire government should turn out for your reception; but I'm rather anxious for the people to know that we thoroughly approve the agreement with Agron Metals."

"You've met opposition?"

"From the priesthood, yes. They're basically conservative, and they stand in the way of progress in the name of the past. Frankly, sir, the largest part of our revenue derives from the metals franchise; we can't afford to lose it. So that my people may understand what we owe to you, I have started the ancient Games again, in the name of Agron Metals."

"The Games?"

"Various athletic competitions. The opening festival is scheduled for tonight, to coincide with your arrival. The priests have been preaching against it ever since I made the an-

nouncement a week ago; they contend the Games are barbaric and anti-religious, because in ancient times they were replaced by the more sophisticated rituals in the worship of Thon. The cruder elements and the savagery, of course, I have no intention of reviving; but the pageantry will be a good thing for Thon. We're inclined to take things too seriously; we have to learn to relax and laugh. As nearly as I can judge, the people are with me. Let the priests rave; the Thonians enjoy a spectacle—particularly when it costs them nothing."

DIRRUL studied the elderly Chief Thonar as he talked, and found that he liked him. The ruler had none of the pompous bombast Dirrul had encountered in other primitive societies. He seemed entirely honest, intelligent, and level-headed. Dirrul made a mental note that he would probably be able to call upon the Chief Thonar for help if he found evidence of a Vininese conspiracy on Thon.

At a crowded intersection in the heart of Walthea, their wagon of state was held up by a mob. Across the heads of the throng, Dirrul saw a black-robed Thonian standing on the pedestal of a carved, marble statue and exhorting the crowd. Black, Dirrul had learned, was the traditional color of the priesthood. The priest had been fulminating against foreign influence, against exploitation by Agron and the Planetary Union.

His latest words rang out in the embarrassing quiet, "Smash their space-ships; root out the terrifying Transmitter-God they have built on our soil! Only then will the people of Thon find again the goodness of the Great Thon Himself!"

The wagon of the Chief Thonar moved on in the hushed silence. Dirrul clenched his fists. The Vininese were here; there was little doubt of it now. The priests were spreading their

propaganda for them. Yes, pull down the Transmitter and call it a foreign God; and when it was gone, the Vininese could move in with their shattering brand of slavery. One thing seemed clear: the agent of Vinin would be found among the priesthood. It narrowed the unknowns in Dirrul's problem considerably.

"Please accept my apologies for what you have just heard," the Chief Thonar said. "If you wish, I can have the priest arrested and held for questioning; but it will do no good."

"Of course not," Dirrul said quickly; by all means he must not allow his suspicion to run ahead of the accumulation of evidence.

"This is simply a part of the general friction between the government and religion. The priests of Thon are nearly autonomous. They have their own courts, their own law, their own force of police. Their hold on the people is such that I can't crush them with direct action without destroying the government, and throwing all Walthea into chaos—easy pickings for the barbarians. We must temporize and compromise and argue; slowly, I think, we will make progress toward understanding and common purpose."

Dirrul decided he not only liked the Chief Thonar, but admired him; in a hesitant way, the ruler seemed to be groping toward a vague concept of the Rational Potential as he attempted to solve his own problems of state.

With considerable ceremony the Chief Thonar and his satellite Conthonars delivered Dirrul to the tourist hotel in Walthea, where the Agron Metals Agent had his office and apartment. But Dirrul was not left long alone. He barely had time to bathe and change into the gaudy dress uniform of the commercial agent before another delegation called to escort him to the palace for the banquet that would signal the opening of the Games.

3



IT WAS DUSK, and the marble-walled palace was lighted by stately rows of orange flares, held aloft in brackets of hand-wrought gold. The stone banquet-tables were spread on an open porch overlooking a yellow lawn that sloped gently toward the shore of the Thundering Water. Flares on tall, wooden posts lined the slope, lighting it with a flickering brilliance.

Most of the nobility of the Praelonium, and the upper hierarchy of the priesthood, had gathered for the banquet. On the yellow field outside were scattered groups of naked youths and maidens, most of them practicing the various skills in which they would compete when the Games began. A group of musicians, clothed in green, was assembled on a platform at one end of the porch; but the chatter of the throng was so loud Dirrul could not hear what they were playing. Which was just as well, he conceded, having heard recordings of the peculiarly shrill and dissonant music favored by the Thonians.

Servants moved among the crowd with trays of drinks, served in heavy platinum goblets. Dirrul took one, anticipating the sweet mixture of pressed fruit pulp which the Thonians traditionally served to their guests. But the harsh, raw flame of alcohol bit violently at his throat. Gasping for breath, Dirrul realized that the sociology of the people he had learned from the hypno-teacher hadn't been altogether accurate. Yet it was seldom that the records were mistaken—unless the facts originally stamped upon the disks had altered with the passage of time.

A moment later two towering nobles passed him, and he caught a tantalizing fragment of their conversation. "I was only assigned forty slaves after the last barbarian attack," one had said to the other, "and it is ridiculous for me to try to run the plantation at Goli with so few."

"These things take time to straighten out," was the reply. "It is still a new system. I have fifteen good men I can let you have for—um—shall we say three hundred pounds of Crinolin spice?"

"Three hundred pounds! I paid through the nose for that stuff to be smuggled in. By the black of Thon, you drive an Agronian bargain!"

Dirrul's head swam. The whole history of Thon, as he had absorbed it, was false. Quite openly, the people enjoyed drunkenness, slavery, and smuggled spice—yet the hypno-reels had taught him that the Thonians were intensely serious, stuffily moral, and proud of their deliberate isolation from luxury!

A BLARING discord of wind-instruments summoned the guests to the overflowing tables. Dirrul, as agent for Agron Metals, was assigned the seat of honor to the right of the Chief Thonar. On his other side sat a thin, cruel-faced, very old man in the black robes of the priesthood. He was the Anthon of Thon, chief priest of the monotheistic religion of the planet.

Young slave-girls brought food and drink to the tables. They were clothed in the filmy gauze which Dirrul recognized as a product of Agronian mills, even though the Thonian government officially banned such imports. Much of the food, and all of the spices on the table, had been imported from the Planetary Union.

Many of the nobles were already drunk, but neither the Anthon nor the Chief Thonar did more than sip the fiery liquid in their platinum mugs.

Both men ate in a brooding silence, with neither relish nor pleasure.

During the third course the Chief Thonar pushed aside his plate and whispered to Dirrul, "You see here another phase of my problem. We have our laws against imports. My nobles suggest them and pretend to enforce them. Yet they circumvent the ban for their own pleasure—and I am forced to do so, too, if I hope to keep in harmony with them. On the one hand, my aristocracy is learning to practice the basest sort of hypocrisy; while, on the other, the priests demand more austerity than we have ever practiced before. It is sometimes hard to bring about a compromise."

As the banquet ended, a second blast of wind-instruments signaled the start of the Games. The naked athletes lined up on the yellow field; the guests hitched their cushioned couches to the edge of the porch. In the name of Agron Metals, Dirrul was asked to ignite a specially-prepared flare, which flamed blue and red and yellow in alternating waves. A relay-team of beautiful women took it from his hand and carried the torch across the field, plunging it into the Thundering Water. The cheering arose from the assembled athletes, and the contests began.

The festivities continued for hours in the balmy night air. The nobles drank and gambled and toyed with the slave-girls, who came to sit on their couches with them. The final contest was a vicious, unorganized battle—involving perhaps a thousand men—for the possession of a metal trophy set atop a greased pyramid in the center of the field. Carried on the shoulders of half a dozen naked maidens, the victor followed the blaring musicians around the field, pausing at the banquet table to salute the Chief Thonar, who presented a medal which the young man hung around his neck.

The orange flares on the field were extinguished, and the crowds began to

depart. One by one the Chief Thonar's guests pulled themselves to their feet and staggered drunkenly toward the street.

To the banquet Dirrul had intentionally worn the gold ring which he had been given by the dying Thonian, on the chance that someone might see it and perhaps identify it. As the crowd thinned rapidly, he gave the ring to the Chief Thonar, while the Anthon looked on with veiled eyes. The elderly ruler examined it deliberately, and then shook his head.

"It may be Thonian workmanship," he conceded, "but the symbols mean nothing to me." He showed the ring to the high priest. "Is this one of your religious charms?"

The priest examined the ring for a moment, and then returned it to Dirrul haughtily. "The priesthood of Thon has no charms and no incantations. The ornament might be barbarian. I understand one or two of the backward tribes have developed tribal idols of their own."

AS DIRRUL turned to depart, the thin, wrinkled hand of the Anthon closed tight on his arm. "So soon you must leave us?" the high priest asked in a smooth, insinuating voice. "Your wine-cup is still full."

"I have no taste for it."

"No? But is that not the chief element of the culture your people would bring to Thon? On many occasions I have spent an evening observing how tourists from the Planetary Union spend their leisure hours."

Dirrul smiled—he hoped disarming-ly. "Intoxication is a habit developed by many races; I have never heard it classified as a culture."

"I had forgotten. You have brought us something else as well: trade-treaties and the new Transmitter-God. You pretend to help us, while you steal the resources of our soil in exchange for nothing."

"The trade-agreements are settled,

I believe, by the government rather than the priesthood. As for the Transmitter, it is a device—a weapon of defense—and nothing more."

"From what do you defend us?"

"Outside aggression, so that you may work out your own destiny in your own way. At the time we first came to Thon, we explained that the Galactic War had developed two ultimate weapons. One is the wave-transmitter of the Vininese; with it they can master a planet forever by destroying every individual's ability for rational thought. The other weapon is the Nuclear Beam developed by the Agronian scientists. The Beam-Transmitter can throw a stratospheric shell around any planet. No object made of metal—no spaceship, for example—can penetrate it. The Beam gives you the ability to isolate yourselves at will. No foreign space-fleet can threaten your planet, because you can destroy it merely by turning the dial of your Beam."

"If this Confederacy of Vinin exists—and I say 'if' deliberately, sir, since I have seen no evidence of that except what you Agronians choose to tell us—but if there is such a threat to our security, why should they attack Thon? We are an isolated sun-system, far within the territory of your Planetary Union. What reason would the Vininese have for attacking us?"

"Your resources; the slave-work of your people; your uncounted wealth."

The Anthon stood up, twisting his black cloak around him. "You talk like a politician, sir; I was under the impression you came here as a commercial agent. Possibly the thing you really fear is that the Vininese Confederacy may offer us more than empty baubles for the privilege of trading with Thon. May I bid you good evening?"

The priest stalked out of the banquet hall.

The Chief Thonar had been standing

in the background during Dirrul's talk with the Anthon. He came forward, now, shaking his head sadly.

"I thought it better not to interfere," he apologized. "The Anthon is a very dangerous man when he is aroused, and nothing I could have said would have made him any calmer. Well, one day—let us hope!—Thon will take him to the Great Rest, and we can replace him with a younger, more progressive man."

DIRRUL walked thoughtfully back to his hotel apartment, through the black and silent streets of Walthea. By every apparent circumstance, the high priest of Thon was the subverted voice of Vinin. Yet, it was conceivable that the Anthon was no more than a valuable dupe—a screen for the real agent of Vinin. There was even a slim possibility that the high priest had expressed his own reasoned opinion.

A nagging doubt that he had somehow missed an obvious point persisted in Dirrul's mind. It was unformulated, except as a series of questions. Why had the hypno-teacher lied? Why had the aristocracy suddenly begun to indulge in lasciviousness and strong drink? What had abruptly sapped the stamina of the society to the point where smuggling and slavery had become open vices? To the point where even the Chief Thonar was forced to accept the lower standards or lose his grip on the government?

Dirrul found the reception-room of the tourist-hotel dark and empty, except for the huge Thonian clerk sleeping behind the desk. But as he approached his own apartment, he heard muffled noises and he saw a faint, flickering light.

Stealthily he pushed open the panel door. A woman gasped with fright and turned to face him. She was very young and very beautiful, wearing only the loose and wildly-seductive black garment of a Thonian priestess. Dirrul's

traveling-bags were open at her feet, the contents scattered over the thick carpet.

"Who sent you? What do you want?" he demanded, moving toward her slowly. She stared at him, her eyes cold and bright in the wavering light of the flare she had put in the bracket beside his bed. "What do you think you'll find?" he repeated.

She conquered her fear quickly. "Everything is in order," she answered. "Too good, as if you expected me to question your papers. You are not the Metals Agent."

She moved her arm a little beneath the folds of her robe. "Go back to those who sent you; tell them we want none of your kind here!"

Her hand swept out then, smashing the flare out of the bracket and plunging the room into darkness. Dirrul moved to prevent her escape, but she was an eight foot woman with Amazonian strength. Her clenched fist struck his jaw, jolting him back against the wall. He heard the soft pounding of her sandaled feet in the corridor, and attempted to pursue her; but he lost her in the dark streets of Walthea.

Early the next morning Dirrul was awakened by a deafening clatter of drums. From the window of his apartment, he saw palace heralds parading the dusty streets behind corps of drummers. At intervals they paused to read and post a government proclamation. When a group stopped outside the hotel, Dirrul heard their booming voices clearly.

"The northern barbarians have united and are attacking the frontier. Already the border fortresses have fallen. This day the Praelonium of Walthea proclaims the military call for all males in Class A. By the grace of Thon, victory will be ours."

DIRRUL dressed quickly and went outside. The streets of Walthea were thronged with chaotic, eddying mobs, stirred and somewhat frightened,

but uncertain what to do. On nearly every corner, priests clattered the holy cymbals and cried exhortations on two recurrent themes: "Throw out the foreigners!" and "Destroy the barbarians; this time no truce, only annihilation."

The dust rose in yellow clouds from the street, beaten into miniature whirlwinds by the churning wheels of passing war chariots as the various military units assembled before the villas of the commanding nobles. Choked and sweating, Dirrul went into a corner lounge and ordered a Thonian fruit-pulp drink.

The attendant sized him up critically, and then bent close to whisper, "We've something stronger, my friend. Right off the spaceship it is, too."

Dirrul accepted the prohibited hospitality. Since the lounge was empty, the huge attendant sat down to talk.

"A lot of excitement we're having this morning," he said. "But it will pass; it always does. The barbarians have been attacking our borders as long as I can remember; nothing ever comes of it, except maybe higher taxes—and not even that, now, since we've got Agron Metals to foot the bills."

Dirrul sipped the raw liquor slowly, listening carefully to the Thonian's friendly gossip. It was the first contact he had had with the common man of Walthea, and he might learn much of the popular point of view. He discovered that the barbarian attacks had become more frequent within the past year, and more successful. The priests constantly called for war; but the Chief Thonar somehow always managed to patch together a peace of sorts at the last minute.

It seemed to be common knowledge that outright conflict would be disastrous, because the various Walthean army corps were responsible only to their individual commanders, drawn entirely from the nobility; and it was notoriously impossible for any of the

nobles to work together for extended periods of time. So long as the Chief Thonar appeased, satisfied, or amused the aristocracy, his power was intact; but without the support of the noble Conthonars he could do nothing.

A new fervor shook the milling crowd outside the little shop. They suddenly seemed to have found a leader; sluggishly they were moving in one direction, shouting in unison. Dirrul paid the attendant and went to see what remained orderly, while the procession of priests leading the mob toward the spaceport. Banging their cymbals over the swirling dust, they chanted discordantly, "Burn the Transmitter! Destroy the foreign God!"

The threat of violence, however, was entirely spectacle and show. The mob remained orderly, while the procession of priests lined them up along the fence of the spaceport. The chanting ceased; the cymbals fell silent; a priest of high rank mounted an improvised podium and delivered a stylized lecture on the virtues of spartan morality. When it was over the crowd broke up.

IN THE CONFUSION, a slovenly, stooped beggar suddenly seized Dirrul's arm and drew him into the shelter of a doorway.

"You are the Metals Agent?" the beggar asked breathlessly.

"Yes; from Agron."

"Go back! Tell them they must annex Thon. Tomorrow it may be too late. Tell them—"

A band of armed police surrounded them, dragging the beggar away. The police wore wide, black armbands, indicating that they were the constabulary of the Thonian priesthood. The Anthon himself rode behind them on a large, fur-skinned beast of war.

As the beggar was carried away, he saluted Dirrul sardonically, and said, "Accept my apologies, sir, that you

should have been disturbed by a barbarian spy on such a peaceful morning in our capital. We shall make an example of this beggar. We cannot allow our tourists and commercial travelers to be frightened by the petty vermin of our planet, or we might lose the revenue you bring us." The high priest saluted again, and rode off through the mob.

Dirrul walked toward the palace, his decision made. The situation was too explosive for him to wait any longer for direct evidence that the high priest was himself the agent of Vinin. It was clear that the priest meant to destroy the Transmitter; it was equally clear that he had not intended Dirrul to hear what the beggar had to say, and it had seemed very important. Perhaps the priest was himself guiltless; but knowingly or not he spoke for Vinin, and Thon had to be protected from his folly.

If the increased chaos, the co-ordinated attack of the barbarians, and the violence of the priesthood were engineered by Vinin, it could only mean that the Vininese attack on Thon was very close. They could bring in neither their wave-transmitter nor their space-fleet, however, as long as the Nuclear Beams functioned. The important thing, then, was to see to that; their internal problems, the Thonians could settle for themselves.

If the crews maintaining the Beam-Transmitter had still been Agronian, Dirrul's task would have been simple. As it was, he would have to work through the Chief Thonar. Fortunately, the ruler seemed both wise and perceptive; he would listen to reason.

As he considered possible arguments to make to the Chief Thonar, a brilliant subterfuge occurred to Dirrul. The Beam-Transmitter must be secretly dismantled and moved. The ray could then be turned on and left on. No Vininese ship—and no other, for that matter—could land on Thon, and the planet would be safe. But if the

Vininese agent, whoever he might be, assumed the Transmitter was located at its original site, it was there he would go to destroy it; and it was there Dirrul could trap him.

4



ITH VERY little difficulty, considering the situation which had suddenly developed on the frontier, Dirrul gained an audience with the Chief Thonar. The elderly ruler

listened calmly while Dirrul made his proposal.

"For a commercial agent," the Chief Thonar said gently, "you have a remarkable grasp of political relationships."

"Where Vinin is involved, we are all forewarned," Dirrul said smoothly. "The Galactic War is still fresh in our minds."

"For a moment I thought you might be an agent from Agron, one of those legendary figures they call a space-pilot. How dearly I would love to meet one!"

"More legend than fact," Dirrul said. "I've grown up in the Planetary Union, and have still to meet one myself."

The Chief Thonar sighed. "You're right, of course. Now let me be sure that I understand what you want me to do. I am to dismantle the Transmitter in secret, and—" He paused and looked up suddenly. "Yes, my dear? Can I help you?"

A deep, musical voice said, "Oh, I'm so glad the Transmitter is to be destroyed! I couldn't help overhearing, sir."

Dirrul whirled. A priestess had entered the room behind them, moving toward the sheltered alcove where the Chief Thonar held audience. She was

the same woman Dirrul had surprised rifling his room the night before; he was sure of it. Yet when he looked her in the face, she stared back boldly, with no indication that she recognized him.

"I come from the Anthon," the girl said. "He has just taken a barbarian spy, masquerading as a beggar; he wants you to come and read the information the man gave before—" There was a catch in her voice, and she looked away quickly. "—before he died."

Dirrul was bewildered by the reaction of the priestess. She could be caught in the process of robbing his room, and still face him before the Chief Thonar with no sign of fear. Yet the death of an unknown beggar, an enemy spy, seemed to cause her uncontrollable grief.

"Perhaps it is important," the ruler agreed. "I'll come at once." As the priestess turned to depart, he called after her, "My dear, this business of dismantling the Transmitter—for the moment, it must be a secret between us. No one is to know about it; no one at all."

"I quite understand," she replied, with a formal and stately nod of her head.

To Dirrul the Chief Thonar said, when they were alone again, "You can rest easy about any Vininese invasion; I promise you the Transmitter will be relocated by nightfall. I will personally see to it that the mechanism is turned on, and it will not go off again until I have your assurance that every Vininese agent on Thon has been removed."

"Have you selected a site for the Transmitter?"

The Chief Thonar hesitated briefly. "Why—why, yes. The Games will be postponed because of this trouble on the frontier. I'll put the Transmitter in the field behind the palace." The ruler arose, adjusting the folds of

his robe. "Now, if you will forgive me, I must at least pay my respects to the Anthon, and listen to his information."

DIRRUL ate a quick meal at the lounge near the palace; then he pushed through the sweating mob to the spaceport. As an ordinary precaution he would have to send a teleray to the commercial exchange on Agron, advising the cancellation of all commercial flights to Thon, since the Beam-Transmitter would seal off the planet within a few hours. In the original agreement made with the Thonian government, only one teleray was to be allowed on Thon, since the device was classified as an undesirable invention. That single teleray was maintained at the spaceport, for the benefit of tourists and commercial agents.

Dirrul went into the booth and found the teleray badly in need of repair. It was what he should have anticipated in such a forgotten outpost, so far from maintenance-crews. The stabilization-beam was slightly unbalanced, and the clear-circuit was crossed. He began to make minor adjustments so that he could put through his message; and abruptly the receiver picked up another call. The voice was garbled by the crossed circuit, but the language was clearly Vininese; in a brief interval of clarity he heard a frightening half-sentence, "...an Agronian Agent in Walthea, of probable space-pilot status, and the Vininese attack must be made at once before an Agronian immobilization-fleet can..."

The box went dead, and cold sweat covered Dirrul's forehead. This was the evidence he needed: another teleray was illegally operating on Thon; there were devices which could locate it. He must explain to the Chief Thonar at once what the message implied, and get emergency-permission to import the necessary tracers.

He made his own call, and hurried through the Customs Building toward the city. The mob outside the space-port was thicker than ever, massive, sweating beings towering two feet and more above Dirrul. He was lost, like a child caught in a swirling throng of adults. The only way he could move ahead was by clinging close to the house walls, and moving along them with his shoulders pressed against the stone.

Suddenly, at an intersection, the mob parted for a moment; Dirrul was surrounded by a band of men, roughly-garbed in animal skins. A heavy fist struck the back of his head, and he collapsed quietly.

DIRRUL'S mind cleared slowly. As the black mist rolled away, he found that he was strapped to a kind of gold-embossed saddle on the back of one of the fur-skinned Thonian riding-animals. His beast was one of several, moving in single-file, caravan-fashion, through a lush, wild countryside. The shrubs and grasses were the bright yellow of typical Thonian vegetation; tremendous, tree-like growths towered above the twisting trail, blotting out the fading afternoon sunlight.

Dirrul was tied in such a way that he could see very little; but occasional glimpses of his captors made it clear that he had fallen into the hands of Thonian barbarians. They were all huge, rough, black-bearded men, garbed in odiferous robes made from animal-skins. *Weapons-belts* were strapped around their waists. They carried full complements of long, iron knives and spiked, metal spheres, fastened at the end of linked chains. Ornamented, metal-faced shields were strapped to their saddles.

And these men had kidnapped him in broad daylight from the streets of Walthea—at a time when the capital was aroused to war against the barbarians! The thing didn't ring true

with the facts as Dirrul understood them. If a beggar had been taken that morning and executed as a barbarian spy, how had these men escaped with impunity? Obviously, someone in Walthea was in league with the barbarians; just as obviously it would be the agent of Vinin.

But it was the priesthood Dirrul suspected; and it was the high priest who had ordered the arrest of the beggar.

Suddenly Dirrul perceived the relationship. The only evidence he had that the beggar was a barbarian was the statement of the priestess; and she was repeating what the high priest had told her to say. The beggar could have been representing any group of Thonians; an intelligent segment of the aristocracy, perhaps, who had discovered the Vininese conspiracy and needed Agronian assistance to prevent it.

The Vininese were working through the priesthood to arouse the Waltheans to war; at the same time they were backing the barbarian conquest. Hadn't the attendant in the eating-lounge said that the border-attacks had become more frequent in recent months? It was the familiar Vininese policy to create chaos—revolution and violence and instability—and then step in to bring order. And slavery to Vinin.

The caravan wound through a gray-stoned mountain pass and emerged on a long, yellow plateau. A group of slovenly huts and tents were clustered around a narrow mountain stream. Beyond them, thousands of men sat around evening camp fires, while others were in a deserted part of the plain practicing the skills of war. Far in the distance, indistinct in the gathering blue mist of night, Dirrul saw the stone towers of a captured border-fortress.

They took him from his animal and, binding his hands and feet again, dragged him into one of the filthy

huts. In the center of the camp, in front of a hut larger than the rest, Dirrul saw the last element of proof that he needed: a battered, improvised teleray machine fastened to a crude, metal box that housed the transmission machinery. Three tall Thonians sat on the ground in front of the teleray, adjusting dials and circuits, and listening intently with antiquated receptors clamped to their ears.

THE DOOR of the hut was locked shut. Dirrul was thrown on the dirt floor and left alone. Slowly he managed to roll close to one wall and, using it as a support, he shoved himself into a sitting position. A long gash in the wall-planking gave him a restricted view of the camp. He could see the teleray, a row of dirty tents, and a narrow strip of yellow field below the fortress.

The teleray indicated that this barbarian camp was the location of the Vininese power on Thon. It could only have been from here that the message was sent which Dirrul had accidentally intercepted. Yet, as he studied the machine and watched its Thonian operators, it puzzled him. If the teleray had been set up by Vinin, why had the job been so amateurish? The device, even from a distance, looked as if it had been patched together from odds and ends and discarded—the sort of thing which a beginning-student at the Ad-air University might have made as a hobby project. It was remarkable that it served its purpose at all.

Nonetheless Dirrul was sure he had found what he was seeking. Shortly the Agent of Vinin would come to the prison hut. He might talk to Dirrul; or he might not. The Vininese seldom allowed themselves either relaxation or triumph. Dirrul would simply be disposed of quietly. He doubted that the full camp of barbarians were aware they were the shock-troops of Vinin; perhaps not many of the leaders knew

who gave them their orders, or why. The Agent, then, would have to remove Dirrul without fuss or display. The probable weapon would be a sudden blast from a disintegrator beam—fast and relatively painless. Even the Vininese did not go in for torture, unless it suited their purposes.

Dirrul laughed bitterly; the laugh was tinged with irony when he thought of Dr. Kramer, and the professor's insistence that the problem was a question of semantics. How could the science of meaning extricate Dirrul from this particular situation? Possibly on the night before, when he had talked to the Anthon of Thon, Dirrul might have framed the dialogue differently. Yet he was sure the results would have been substantially the same. Even then he had suspected the priest; closer attention to semantics would only have made him entirely certain.

As the sun set, the barbarian camp stirred sluggishly into activity. Through the crevice in the wall, Dirrul saw the men forming into companies, adjusting weapons, mounting their beasts of war. There was little noise or confusion as they prepared for their attack on Walthea. The various groups worked in harmony; they seemed well-disciplined. It was strange that so much intense purpose and energy was to be channeled into a victory for Vinin.

An animal galloped across Dirrul's line of vision; a woman dismounted. He recognized the priestess who had searched his room. It was the last link he needed to reconstruct the tie-up between Anthon and the barbarians. Academically, perhaps, it was satisfying to discover that he had been right; but it was a dry and frustrating kind of satisfaction.

The priestess went into the large hut briefly. When she came out, she walked toward Dirrul's prison. She carried a weapon in her hand. The pale light glinted on the barrel; Dirrul recognized the multiple-unit disin-

tegrator which was commonplace throughout the Galaxy. This particular model had probably been made in Vinin. So the Thonian priestess had been dispatched to remove him, Dirrul thought—with something of regret, because he had rather looked forward to meeting the Vininese agent face to face. Vaguely, at the back of his mind, he had clung to a slim thread of hope, that by reason he might dissuade the agent from his purpose. It had been known to happen before. Perhaps the agent had delegated the priestess to the task for precisely that reason.

THE PRIESTESS came into Dirrul's hut, shutting the door and lighting the single bracket-flare that hung beside it. In the orange light she turned to face Dirrul, holding the weapon steadily in her hand. Outside the noise and shouting reached a climax; the barbarian army had begun to march. The soft clatter of their swords on metal shields made a background patter, like muffled drumbeats, for the girl's talk.

"I gave you a warning," she said emotionlessly.

Dirrul made no reply, staring at her intently, trying to penetrate the shell of her personality, probing for weak points. Even now he found it quite impossible to accept either defeat or death as inevitable. There was still a possibility for escape, if he could find it; Thon was still not lost.

She bent over and cut the rope that bound his legs.

"Stand up," she ordered. "I cannot say what I must to a man who grovels at my feet."

He leaned against the wall, flexing the muscles in his legs to restore circulation. "My hands are tied, too," he said softly.

"Later. I have no intention of killing you; that would be much too easy a way out. No; we want to send you back. Back to your own people. Say to them, for us, that we want nothing

of yours; none of your ways and none of your things. They can punish you for your failure in their own way."

She stepped back a little, looking down at the barrel of her gun. "This means nothing to you or your people, but I must still say it because it is what I believe—what we all believe. We are not barbarians; we are the people of Thon. We believe in freedom and in justice and in liberty. That is the kind of world we mean to have, when we have smashed this sham you have set up in Walthea. Tell your people that when you go back to them."

Dirrul had wondered if he could appeal to her with the logic of the Rational Potential—for what else was it but an extension of a belief in freedom and justice and liberty? He realized now that it would be fruitless. She was too certain of the internal truth of her own convictions. And her words made sense, as words; there was no counter-argument that he could make her understand in her own terms. She was duped by Vinin; he knew that. Here, of course, was the opportunity for a semantic solution to the problem, but how could he make it when her meanings were already fixed? In truth he could say nothing except what she had already said herself; it was the philosophy of his own world. The tragedy was that she had accepted the emptiness of Vininese meanings, without recognizing the slavery they concealed.

She broke open a pocketknife and moved toward him. "You will ride with us tonight. When Walthea falls, we will put you on a spaceship and send you home. Don't come back; we will not be this considerate next time."

She bent to cut the cords that bound his hands. Suddenly she gasped, as her knife bit into the rope and freed him. She stood up to look into his eyes, her mouth wide with shock, her hands shaking.

Dirrul had no idea what had upset her, but it was the split-second he needed. He kicked the disintegrator

out of her hand, and threw his weight against her. Grunting in pain, she collapsed, her head striking the wall. She lay still.

Dirrul snatched down the flare and extinguished it before he stole out of the hut. The camp was a turmoil of moving men and animals. Clinging close to the shadows, he crept toward a deserted corral. The tremendous animals of Thon were docile creatures, entirely voiceless. Stealthily he led one away from the others; stealthily he mounted into the saddle, clinging close to the gold pommel.

5



AT THE EDGE of the encroaching forest, he stopped and looked back across the yellow plateau, now turning copper-colored in the moonlight. The barbarian army had assembled

under the wall of the captured border fortress; in organized ranks they were moving forward, on a broad road that led down through the foothills. Far ahead, on the edge of the horizon, he saw a pall of black smoke, turning dull red in the reflection of the flames burning beneath it.

Dirrul hoped desperately that the Chief Thonar would find the means of turning back the invasion; perhaps the flood of events would force the nobles to unite and fight in unison. But whatever were the final results, Dirrul had no authority to interfere in the local fighting. His only legitimate purpose was to see to it that the conflict remained local. To do so, he had to reach Walthea as quickly as he could, and make certain that, if the barbarians took the capital, the Beam-Transmitter would not be destroyed.

In a general way, he knew the di-

rection he should take. The barbarian attack had been referred to as trouble on the northern frontier; Walthea, then, would be somewhere to the south. He had a further clue to go on. From the time he had regained consciousness that afternoon, the caravan had been moving steadily upward into the foothills. To return to Walthea he would have to follow a route that descended to sea-level. Nor could the distance be great. He had been kidnapped shortly before midday; by sunset the barbarian caravan had reached the frontier camp.

Aside from the unknown geography of Thon, Dirrul had one other obstacle to face. The invading barbarians were moving forward very rapidly, spreading out across the Praelonium of Walthea like an expanding fan. Throughout the night, he had to move with extreme caution, frequently hiding in abandoned cottages or behind outcroppings of rock to escape barbarian patrols. He lost valuable time, but the contacts with the invaders were a help, too, for the spearhead of their attack was focused upon Walthea; as long as the invading army was close, Dirrul knew he was moving in the right direction.

IT WAS NOT until dawn that Dirrul came within sight of the capital city. There was severe fighting going on in the outskirts; long arms of flame rose high against the brightening sky. Only scattered marauders had entered the city proper. The area near the spaceport was entirely quiet.

Dirrul entered Walthea from the west, abandoning his riding-animal and walking on foot. Bands of Walthean soldiers patrolled the dusty streets, but when they saw his commercial agent's uniform, they allowed him to pass unchallenged.

The barbarian attack had, of course, been timed to reach Walthea at the same time the Vininese spacefleet was

approaching the stratosphere, preparing to land. As the city defenses slowly crumbled, the Vininese agent would have to perform his last act of betrayal—the Beam-Transmitter would have to be immobilized, at least for the period of time necessary for the Vininese to make a landing.

Since the Beam-Transmitter had been relocated in the palace field, Dirrul considered that Thon was sealed off temporarily and safe, for the moment, from invasion. But only the Chief Thonar and his crew of Thonian technicians knew that. The priestess had overheard enough of the plan to believe that the Transmitter was to be dismantled; she would have reported as much to the Anthon. Yet, to be thorough, the high priest would have to make sure of that himself.

The important thing for Dirrul to do, then, was to keep watch on the old Transmitter-site, at the spaceport. There the priest would come to perform his final villany; and there Dirrul would achieve the purpose of his mission to Thon. Afterwards, whether the barbarians or the Waltheans were victorious in the local war, Dirrul could convince them of the danger they had escaped by presenting the direct evidence of the Anthon's confession.

Dirrul pushed through the soldiers and the weapons of war that cluttered the city streets. Already there was sporadic street-fighting here and there, as bands of Walthean citizens turned on their own soldiers. A feeling of panic and terror spread like a dark shadow over the city. The climax of internal chaos was almost at hand, and Dirrul knew it was only a matter of minutes before the Vininese fleet would swing in through the clouds.

Dirrul passed the dramatically plain Temple of Thon. The massive, gold-faced doors were open, and flickering light cast weird shadows across the stone portico. Soldiers and barbarians

were fighting in front of the building. As Dirrul worked his way past them, clinging to the shadows, a band of priests burst out of the Temple, led by the Anthon himself.

This was it, Dirrul thought grimly. The Anthon would now proclaim a holy pilgrimage, or a festival of sacrifice, or whatever emotive phrase seemed most appropriate to the tragedy, and lead the citizens upon the Beam-Transmitter to destroy it in the name of Thon—and for the glory of Vinin.

But Dirrul's calculations suddenly went wrong. The Anthon stood at the top of the Temple steps, brandishing a glittering blade above his head, and crying to his followers, "Throw back the barbarian! Defend the city of your fathers!"

The priests moved down after him into the fighting mob; and the mob fell back. At the forefront of the attack Dirrul saw the high priest, plying his massive weapon in all directions, and screaming with frantic fervor to his followers. The barbarians seemed unwilling to tangle with him directly; none opposed his sword; all fell back as he approached. Then, above the heads of the throng, Dirrul saw the priestess, riding a beast of war.

"No harm to him!" she cried. "No harm! He must be taken alive, unhurt—or not taken at all!"

The whole Thonian problem, as Dirrul had understood it, was jolted loose, then, smashed into fragments of initial evidence. He had built a wonderful house of supposition, but it was made out of empty words and misinterpreted circumstance. He saw the real truth; and he was shaken with terror.

Thon was lost! Lost through his own blindness and incompetence!

And Dr. Kramer had been right. Semantics would have solved the problem hours ago, if Dirrul had understood what the professor had meant.

DIRRUL turned and fled toward the playing-field behind the palace. He had no time to see the Chief Thonar; no time to pay even lip-service to the forms of legal intervention. The planet of Thon was at stake. There was still one chance that he might keep the Beam-Transmitter functioning, even at the cost of his own life. It would only take a few minutes, because the Vininese fleet would be very close now. If the fleet were destroyed, Thon would have a day—perhaps even two—of grace; in that time the whole Planetary Union could come to the rescue of the Thonians.

Barbarians were fighting in front of the palace. Dirrul ran toward the rear, scaling the low wall, and darting toward the machine that glinted in the dawn light. The palace doors burst open, and he heard sandaled feet pounding on the turf behind him. Panting, he reached the Transmitter. The wires were dead and lifeless. He snapped the dials, as strong arms reached out and pulled him away.

Struggling and cursing, they carried him into the palace and dropped him on the polished floor of the audience alcove. Dirrul sprang to his feet, and found himself ringed by towering barbarians, who carried naked swords in their hands.

"Fools!" he cried. "The Nuclear-Beam must be on, don't you understand? I'm not trying to prevent your revolution. But the Vininese are approaching Thon. They bring you nothing but slavery and degeneration!"

"As you say," one of the barbarians answered quietly, "the Beams must be turned on; and did you not do that yourself only a moment ago?"

"No. Something went wrong! The machine was still dead when you dragged me away!"

The barbarians parted and the priestess came to face Dirrul. Her black robe was torn and soiled; her face was smeared with the grime of

battle, but in her eyes was an excited fire of triumph.

"I had you brought here to hear my apologies," she said gravely.

"There is no time! The Beams—"

"Now you will hear me out; my men will see to that."

She smiled a little, wiping some of the grime from her cheek. "We mistook you for a Vininese agent, just as you mistook our purposes. As I told you before, we are not barbarians. We are the younger generation of Thon; the children of Thon. Some of us are of the nobility; some are artisans; some scholars and priests. We had no patience with the decision of the government that Thon should restrict the science and the knowledge which the planetary Union was willing to teach us. We tried to present our case through legitimate channels, and no one would hear us. We were the young, they said; it was proper for us to wait for the wisdom of years to settle on our shoulders."

"I sympathize thoroughly," Dirrul said, clenching his teeth on the words so that he would speak with what, he hoped, was a tone of reasonableness. "But there is time for polite talk later. Right now, we—"

"ONE BY ONE," the priestess went on quietly, "those of us who spoke out were destroyed. Eventually we fled to the hills and organized the barbarian tribes of the north for revolution. Later, we found that men from Vinin were here, measuring the value of our resources, influencing the gullible with their gaudy lies. We stole books from the tourists and tried to learn enough of your science to communicate the truth to you. With odds and ends, and scraps of discarded machinery that we could pick up at the spaceport, we built our own teleray—but it only functioned once or twice as a transmitter of messages."

"Then that's why your calls for

help," Dirrul put in, "were always interrupted."

"How hard we tried to get through to Agron! We didn't dare use the teleray at the spaceport. And the other good one—well, you know where it is, and it was of no value to us. Our machine did receive wonderfully, however, on all of the closed beams. We were able to listen in on most of the plans for the Vininese invasion; that's how we came to suspect that you were a Vininese agent."

"But I'm not; you can't believe that now! And all the time we're wasting here, while the Beam-Transmitter on the field—"

"There are Vininese spies on Agron," she went on serenely. "Always before, when a new Metals agent came to Thon, they would send their agent here a description of his traits and character, so that it would be easier to conceal from him the facts of our unrest. But when you came, there was no message. The only logical explanation seemed to be that you were a Vininese agent yourself."

"I searched your room; your papers were too perfect, and Vinin is always so thorough about everything! I was absolutely convinced the next morning when I found that you were arranging with the Chief Thonar to dismantle the Transmitter. Consequently, I had you kidnapped. After we took Walthea, we intended to send you back to Vinin, and the thoroughgoing punishment they would devise for an agent who had failed."

"Surely, you know differently now!"

"Yes; I saw the ring you had on your finger, when I went to untie your hands last night. We couldn't get through to Agron with the teleray; so we sent volunteers on the tourist cruisers. It was very dangerous, because each of them had to smuggle himself out of Thon, and the spaceport was always well-guarded. Each of them wore a gold ring made exactly

like yours. The idea was for the Agronians who came to help us to bring one of the rings with them. We would know, then, that they were not Vininese pretending to be our friends. We can't tell a Vininese apart from an Agronian; very few people in the Galaxy can. We had to be sure, because the fate of Thon depended upon it."

"Again, a question of semantics," Dirrul said bitterly. "Last night you told me the truth; I was too blind to see it!"

"When I talked of freedom and liberty and justice?" the priestess asked. "But, naturally. We Thonians are still children. Our language has not yet grown up. The meanings of our words are still few in number, and more or less specific. We can only say what we mean; we haven't yet developed the syntax for misdirection and propaganda."

"Now have you finished?" he asked.

"Except for one small thing."

"Let it wait. The Vininese spacefleet has not yet landed. There is still time to repair the Beam-Transmitter and—"

"I SAID THERE was one more thing. We were always quite aware that the Beam-Transmitter of Agron would have to be temporarily destroyed before the Vininese could successfully attack Thon. While we were reading our stolen books and learning how to build a teleray, we also built a Nuclear Beam-Transmitter. As you know, your scientists published all the data as widely as they could, because they intended the device to become a defensive weapon for all people, everywhere. Our Transmitter is located in the hills; it has been transmitting continually since our attack began last night. Early this morning the nuclometer registered a heavy drain of power; I rather imagine the Vininese spacefleet was caught in the stratosphere of Thon. If this had happened to any other people, I'd say the

disaster might teach them a lesson."

"But not the Vininese," Dirrul agreed; then he smiled, and the pounding tension in his muscles began to relax. "It seems to me that all I've been on Thon is superfluous baggage. From the beginning, you've had your own problem pretty well in hand, and you've done a magnificent job of solving it for yourselves."

"Not entirely superfluous," she said. "You were a kind of catalysis that set off the reaction. You see, while we mistook you for a Vininese, it was perfectly clear to the real agent of Vinin that you were an Agronian, and probably an Agronian space-pilot."

"How? Every official angle was covered—"

"But you wore our ring. The Vininese agent had captured our volunteers before; he knew what it meant. You panicked him into calling for the invasion weeks ahead of schedule; and nothing could have suited our purposes better. Of course you'll want to take your prisoner back to Agron?"

"It's the usual policy," Dirrul explained. "Our psychiatrists will try to readjust the warped mind and the inverted standards. Much of the time they succeed, even with the difficult cases."

The priestess gestured to her band of barbarians. "Bring him in," she asked. "In our case, I hope your treatment is a success, because he could be an invaluable help to us in building a sane and rational society here on Thon. Tell your people that Thon will join the Planetary Union, if you will have us. Say that we have learned the futility of trying to blot out the material facts of progress, or building ourselves to the future by clinging to the customs of the past. The important thing is not the fact of progress or invention or discovery; it is the way in which the people learn to adjust to it. Thon has the philosophy, the ethic, the moral standard; one day you will be proud of our partnership."

She took Dirrul's hand and held it warmly. "I know what I say is true because I speak for my own generation—for the children of Thon. We are the future of our planet; we belong to your world."

THREE HOURS later Dirrul's luxury yacht soared up from the spaceport, its robot navigator set for the Aircommand headquarters on Agron. Bound and shackled in the hospital compartment of the ship was the agent of Vinin, who would have betrayed Thon. He cried in furious anger, and tore at his chains with frustration; even a sedative did nothing to quiet him.

Dirrul studied the face of the prisoner thoughtfully, remembering what Dr. Kramer had said, "*A man who speaks with meanings that are evident pattern-growths from his own past may be a mediocrity, a saint, or a bitter personal enemy. But one thing he cannot be is a traitor to himself or his heritage.*"

Reluctantly, Dirrul admitted to himself that the semantic-solution to the problem had been abundantly clear during the palace-banquet, but he had missed the point. He had not interpreted words from the Thonian's point of view, but only from his own. The high priest had spoken out in bitterness against the Nuclear-Beam and the technological progress it symbolized; but the priest spoke in pride, from his conservative experience-background as a religious leader of a primitive people. And the Chief Thonar had seemed admirable and progressive, because the sentiment he expressed was that of the civilization which Dirrul knew himself.

But the high priest had been an honest man.

And it was the Chief Thonar who writhed in the prisoner's chains—the gentle, cultured, far-sighted ruler of Thon, threatened with insecurity by the disaffection of his nobles and the

revolt of the younger generation. To hold his hereditary grasp upon the power of government, he had been willing to betray Thon even to the slavery of Vinin.

The motive was understandable; in an abstract sense, Dirrul could even sympathize. He still found it possible to admire the Chief Thonar as a per-

son. Like the priestess who had led the revolution, Dirrul fervently hoped the psychiatrists of Agron could remake the ruler's mind and send him back to Thon, whole and sound. A man of vision was always a valuable asset to his people.



IT SAYS HERE

(continued from page 6)

apply; machines are built to make either-or responses, and the human nervous system does work like a machine—in some respects. However that doesn't make a human being the same as a machine.

Question: Does the gostak distim the doshes. Answer "yes" or "no".

Question: Does God cause earthquakes? Answer "yes" or "no".

Question: Does water extinguish fire? Answer "yes" or "no".

Remember that in answering a question you are indicating not only an attitude toward the subject, but a basis for possible action.

There is nothing in Aristotelian logic to indicate that the first question is meaningless. This is one of the first subsidiary questions that a person with a Null-A background is likely to consider. The phrase "the gostak distims the doshes" comes from a story, with the same title, by Miles J. Breur. It was a slogan to be shown entirely meaningless, so far as making any sense is concerned.

There is nothing in Aristotelian logic to indicate that the second question, while meaningful in a very limited sense, is meaningless in any sense necessary to give a verifiable answer. A Believer may try to answer, and his answer may have meaning for him and his fellow Believers; but it has no meaning for the person who wants to measure and predict future events upon the basis of the answer.

Nor is there anything in Aristotelian

logic to indicate that the third question can only get a qualified "yes" or "no". The question assumes that all fires are the same; it does not allow for the existence of fires which water will not quench. Throw water on a gasoline fire, and the water won't extinguish the flame—it'll spread your fire. Throw water on a sodium metal fire and you'll have a real blaze; metallic sodium burns fine in water.

When it comes to making a decision or taking action, one can accurately say that the answer is either "yes" or "no" *if the question is refined enough*. If the question is narrowed down to the specific instances then you either do or don't-do the action in question. Null-A has never denied this; what it does is to supply a set of refining-tools for *asking meaningful questions*. It has long been known that the way a question is phrased has a great deal to do with the answers possible.

Answer "yes" or "no", John Doe: Have you stopped beating your wife?

Ah, but John Doe isn't married at present.

Answer "yes" or "no", John Doe: Have you stopped beating your ex-wife?

But Doe has never laid harsh hands on the woman.

Null-A can most accurately be described as a set of tools, with various ranges of usefulness—and as good within their ranges as the person who

[Turn To Page 84]

A TRANSMISSIBLE MATTER

An SFQ "First"

by Ray Earl Schmidt

(illustrated by Milton Luros)

Theoretically, a machine may be infallible; but human beings aren't, even in theory. So, were matter-transmitters of the type described by our new author, to come into being, we might see an occasional error at the non-mechanical end — one, perhaps, with as hilarious results as in the present story.



NEWS-ITEM appearing in the *San Francisco Daily Messenger*: Luna, July 5/TMT— Warrant Officer Joseph Small, chief operator at the Luna matter-transmitter relaying-station, was severely shaken up during a

baseball game today. The Rock Rabbits, a team of local miners and prospectors, tangled with the team from GHQ in the shade of Old Smoky. At the top of the fifth inning, Klein, the leadoff batter for the Rock Rabbits, belted a drive into deep right field. Small, playing nearly a third of a mile from home base, slipped his binoculars into his spacesuit pocket as the ball approached. He turned to his left and made a powerful running leap, intercepting the ball in fine style some twenty feet above the ground. Unfortunately, the leap carried him out over a minor crater at the limit of the field. He landed, dazed but unhurt, thirty feet below the surface. Hurriedly he tried to peg the ball out, but it struck the rim, causing an avalanche. He regained consciousness in the hospital half an hour after his rescue.

Small was charged with an error on

the play, and Klein was robbed of a home run, being allowed only three bases on any ball coming to rest in a crater. (See the Sports Page for a summary of Lunar baseball ground rules.) GHQ was leading 6-4 when the game was called in the seventh inning on account of sunlight.

Small is expected to resume his duties within a week.

VENUSGRAM

TO: Small
Relay Station
Luna

FROM: Mallory
Communications
GTHQ Venus
July 9/TMT

Subject: Shipment X15235NP
(Standard)
Consigned to
Frontier Hospital
N/W Sector Venus

Frontier Hospital insists that the above-described is the wrong shipment. X15235NP (non-perishable) contained a large amount of laboratory glassware, other scientific-appar-



To put it mildly, Dr. Atterbury was astonished . . .

atus, and an incredible number of music-spools. The Hospital's consignment should have had the PLSA (perishable life, suspended animation) suffix, insofar as they were expecting Dr. Carole Anne Kent, famed microbiologist. She was supposed to take charge of the forces combatting the plague of Venii fever, which rages unchecked.

The Hospital, having adequate laboratory-equipment and no need for the music-spools, is holding the shipment, pending notification of its proper destination.

Concern is expressed over the safety and whereabouts of Dr. Kent. She must be revived within 30 hours after

the inception of suspended animation, and we received Advance Notice of Transmission regarding her some twenty hours ago. Spare no effort in locating her. This is an emergency!

MARSGRAM

TO: Small
Relay Station
Luna

FROM: Kane
Communications
GTHQ MARS

SUBJECT: Shipment X15234PLSA
(Standard)
Consigned to

Professor Reginald
Atterbury
Northern Sector
MARS

The above-described shipment, relayed through you, has been delivered by freight-copter to Atterbury, who is studying Martian life-forms at the edge of the Northern Ice Cap. This consignment was supposed to contain a quantity of scientific apparatus and recorded music.

By the time the copter had returned to GTHQ, Atterbury was on the radio complaining about what seems to me to be the best of good luck. The shipment contained a woman in suspended animation. Her maximum time in SA had almost elapsed, so the Professor revived her as per enclosed instructions. It seems that she is supposed to be on Venus, seeking out an antibiotic to combat 'kill-em-slow', the dreaded Venii fever.

We lack the necessary equipment to repackage her, or we would transmit her back to you. If an emergency arises, transmit to us the plastic chrysalis and other necessities for the transmission of humans.

Meanwhile she's still out there with Atterbury.

LUNAGRAM

TO: Kane
Communications
GTHQ Mars

FROM: Small
Relay Station
LUNA

SUBJECT: Shipments X15235NP
X15234PLSA

Gratified to learn of Dr. Kent's safety.

The mixup occurred here. I was in hospital, Serg. Fusari was on leave to Terra, leaving Corp. (now Pte.) Davidson as ranking transmission-

man. Normally he does our paper and Lunar com. work, with a little dispatch-riding thrown in. He became rattled, placing the first shipment to arrive from Terra in the Mars directional, and the second in the Venus directional, without bothering to check back to the Advance Notice of Transmission. It never occurred to him that they might not come through in the order listed.

Atterbury can deem himself fortunate. He could have received a complete baby layette, highchair, and certain similar parts and attachments that came through at the same time for our Adjutant's wife. I'd have never lifted my head again if that shipment had gone wandering around the Solar System.

Can send you none of the equipment necessary for transmitting humans. You have no doctor on Mars qualified to induce suspended animation. I'll think up some way of explaining away this carelessness for the benefit of the boys on Venus.

From now on, when I play baseball, I play shortstop.

LUNAGRAM

TO: Mallory
Communications
GTHQ Venus

FROM: Small
Relay Station
LUNA
July 10/TMT

FOR: FRONTIER HOSPITAL
N/W SECTOR VENUS

SUBJECT: Shipments X15235NP
X15234PLSA

Due to unforeseen technical difficulties utterly beyond human control Dr. Carole Anne Kent has inadvertently arrived on Mars. She is alive

and well, but the time of her departure for Venus is, as yet, uncertain.

Everything is being done to facilitate the immediate rectification of this unfortunate situation, and the entire transmission-staffs of Terra, Venus, Mars, and Luna join to express deep concern and offer their profoundest apologies.

PERSONAL letter-film from Professor Reginald Atterbury, Northern sector, Mars, addressed to Hon. Charles L. P. Bickstaffe, Bart., Maidstone manor, 16 Vine Road, Little East Southam, Nottingham, Nott., U.K.

Mars, July 11/TMT.

Dear Bip,

I have no idea when you'll receive this letter, but I simply must write. You joshed me no end, Bip, when I accepted McGill University's offer to go to Mars. You could foresee nothing for me but a frightfully-dull semi-prison term. How jolly well wrong you were! As I write this, it's after 02:00MMT, and I couldn't sleep if I did go to bed. The excitement of the last three days has completely intoxicated me.

I'd have written before, but my time has been pretty well taken up in establishing camp, acquiring specimens, and preparing reports for the University. My camp (I've dubbed it Noaks, due to the absence of oaks—or anything else in the vegetable line that grows over four inches high) is located some one hundred twenty or thirty miles south of the Ice Cap's edge. The Martians follow the melting ice, planting their queer grains and vegetables, and rejoicing in the effects of the increased water vapor.

The Martians are quaint little

fellows, resembling the brownies in childrens' story-books. They're quick and shy, avoiding our people as much as possible. As yet, we've made no fruitful contact with them. However, I'm doing my little bit in that direction, too; quite by accident I discovered that they like our music. A number of them halted their northern trek at Noaks one day, enthralled by the vibrations that emanated from my lab. I set up my speaker outside and played off my favorites: Bach *Double Concerto*, Smolensk Symphony Orchestra, Remagen and Schluss, soloists; *Boogie Woogie Classics*, played George 'Gut-Bucket' Skinner; and the *Mikado*, by the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company. They loved it, Bip. They cavorted for joy; they were delirious.

Presently I was obliged to return to the lab. I had to prepare and photograph a specimen of *Cladonia marsiferina* and feed my *Sorex marsati*. The Martians scampered away. Presently a delegation of them returned, so I put on my pressure suit, picked up my camera, and went out. They presented me with what looked to be a big clinker—an uninteresting, earthy lump, resembling bauxite or some such ore. It must be quite valuable to the Brownies. Anyway, they scampered off before I had half-finished my little speech of gratitude. I returned to the lab, tossed the clinker on a work bench, and promptly forgot about it.

I wirelessly GTHQ and placed an order for a good deal of recorded music and certain scientific nubbies that I needed. Fortunately, the University has provided vast piles of good Canadian dollars for my studies here, so I order my supplies from Terra to come via matter-transmitter. I

had in mind a study of the Martians in relationship to us and our music.

One day the freight-copter from GTHQ landed at Noaks, and I helped unload the large, coffin-like box in which standard matter transmissions are made. The weather was a bit unpleasant and we worked the shipment through the air lock. The copter-crew declined tea, wishing to get back over the se en hundred miles to GTHQ as quickly as possible. We hurried to unload fuel for my power plant and compressor.

Bip, when I opened my shipment I got the surprise of my life. I'd got an unclad woman in suspended animation. I went into quite a dither. Can you guess the first thing I did after this shocking discovery? I found myself very carefully combing my beard.

I took firm hold of myself and checked the enclosed data. I learned that she was Dr. Carole Kent, microbiologist, and her SA period was nearly over. I put on water for tea.

AFTER CAREFULLY reading the instructions for reviving her, I checked the temperature, air-pressure, and oxygen-content in the lab; all were within the prescribed limits. I closed valves in the several tubes that led into the plastic sarcophagus from pressure-containers beside it. Then I split this chrysalis, and quickly made the prescribed injection into the proper vein. I didn't permit my mind to wander during all these operations; I was a scientist doing by duty. When I'd completed the work as per instructions I wobbled to a chair.

I didn't dare look at her. It unnerved me; it made me realize what a sheltered life I've been leading. Reluctant but worried, I

went over to have a look at her.

"Holy suffering Pete! What a face full of fungus!" She had spoken, and I was keenly disappointed. I had hoped for someone speaking English. It seemed that some of her words were vaguely-familiar, so I decided she must be a Yankee, gibbering in her native tongue.

Then I realized that she was referring to my beard. I blushed. "Welcome to Noaks, Dr. Kent," I stammered, feeling like a schoolboy. She lay there, Bip, quite unclothed, staring up at me.

"If you'll just turn your back for a minute," she said cheerfully, "I'll exhume my clothes from somewhere out of this tomb. Then you can brief me on the situation."

I went to make tea. I strove to keep my mind blank.

"Hell! This isn't Venus!" she yelled, looking out at the Martian sandstorm.

I introduced myself and asked her to join me for lunch. I explained how there must have been a mixup somewhere in transmission.

Bip, she's a remarkable girl! She's too beautiful to fritter her life away as a microbiologist. She speaks two languages: one is English, and the other is a queer mixture of slang, curses, and slumside jargon that I find very disconcerting. When she found out what had happened, she accepted it with three swearwords, and then she began to prowls about my lab, firing sudden questions and studying my equipment.

She's two people, Bip: one is a skilled scientist, and the other a blunt, cheerful, unself-conscious American woman. She shocks and pleases me immensely.

"Reg," she stated, "your lab is pretty damn crude."

I was slightly nettled. "Miss Kent," I said coolly, "a good deal of scientific apparatus was on its way here to dispel the crudeness that offends *you*, who came in its place."

She laughed merrily. "Call me Carole, Reg—and I think Noaks is out of this world." I had to laugh in turn.

I reached GTHQ on the wireless and told them what had happened. Kane, at Communications, said they'd see us in a few days. He leeringly wished me all the luck in the world. I blushed.

She'd been looking over my specimens. "Know anything about the bugs in the soil, Reg?" she asked, touching my powerful microscope.

"Not too much," I replied. "While the weather's been good, I've been hunting bigger things. I'll check the bacteria when I'm stormbound. However, there's *Cladothrix dictoma* in the muck by the melting snow, and there's *Bacillus radicolica* where there's vegetation. I recognized them because they resemble the Earth-types of those names. I've tentatively put the initial M for Mars behind the Latin, for now.

"You talk my lingo, Reg!" she declared in triumph. "There's an antibiotic in these hills and we're going to dredge it out."

SHE HAS AN enormous capacity for work; she probed all afternoon through the soil-samples that I had indoors. In order to supplement my meagre glass supply, I tortured that plastic chrysalis into petri dishes and other containers. I distilled water, hunted up material for making culture media, and consolidated my dwindling alcohol supply.

She had no success. We made supper and played the Boogie

Woogie classics, to which she taught me a savage dance that is currently being revived in America.

I prepared a bed for myself in the storeroom, leaving such meagre comforts as I had to Carole.

Before retiring, I shaved off my beard, I lay awake, thinking, for a long while.

When I went to the lab to help with breakfast next morning, she said, with her disconcerting frankness: "Why, Reg! You're handsome!" I blushed.

"No fresh soil-samples today," she said gloomily, as she looked out at the sandstorm. "Say, Reg, what's that chunk of whatever-it-is on the far bench?"

I explained that it was some sort of Martian wealth. She began a patient, brooding examination of it under the microscope. An hour later she let out a blood-curdling whoop; she had discovered a promising breed of bugs, as she calls them.

As I write this, it's late night of the second day after the discovery. Already a culture of these bugs, feeding on the bacteria from the dirtiest thing in the Universe—the human mouth—is producing a minute quantity of a deep purple substance. Miss Kent feels that this might be our antibiotic.

"It'll probably make more stiffs than Venii fever," was her rather inelegant comment. "There's bound to be something wrong with it, but let's rejoice until we find out what."

She kissed me before I retired to the store room for the night. I couldn't sleep so I pound out this letter to you, Bip. I'll film it in the morning and mail it when the GTHQ copter comes again.

There's a great deal more to tell you of my work here, which

seems to grow more interesting every day, but it can wait until I return to England. I look forward to seeing you, and be sure to have several bottles of good port for my home-coming.

Sincerely,

Reg Atterbury.

P. S. It seems that people must take off their clothes prior to transmission. Sometimes shipments encounter some sort of cosmic interference, and the matter becomes scrambled. Perhaps you will recall the case of Major van Leek, who materialized in the receiver on Io with his clothes inside him. Lose more Majors that way, what?

THE FOLLOWING is a transcript of a telephone conversation between Sergeant Kane, at Communications, GTHQ, Mars, and Brig. K. K. Detweiler, Officer Commanding, Administration Building, Mars.

KANE: Hello, sir. A Terragram for you, sir. Shall I have it delivered to Administration?

DETWEILLER: Personal or policy, Kane?

KANE: Ah—er—policy, I think, sir.

DETWEILLER: Read it to me, please, and send it over later.

KANE:

TERRAGRAM

TO: Kane
Communications
GTHQ Mars

FROM: Thornhill Miss Claudia
President
Society for the Protection
and Upholding of Moral
and Ethical Standards
(SPUMES)

Chicago Ill USA
July 12/TMT

FOR: Brig K K Detweiler
Officer Commanding
GTHQ Mars

SUBJECT: Dr Carole Anne Kent
Prof R Atterbury

We view with deep concern the continued juxtaposition of the two above-mentioned scientists without proper chaperoning, as mentioned in the daily news-dispatches from Mars. In this day and age of tremendous progress, all eyes are focused upon our brilliant men and women of science and culture, who, by virtue of their achievements, tower head and shoulders above common humanity. It behooves these famous people to conduct themselves in nothing but an exemplary fashion lest the morals of the solar system's people be riddled and completely undermined.

Our Society is grieved, Brig. Detweiler, by your failure to recognize the hazard and act upon it. The SPUMES Board of Directors urges you to take the proper steps immediately. You will either (1) arrange to have the above-mentioned chaperoned, or (2) remove Dr. Kent to GTHQ. Your failure to comply will place upon your shoulders a burden of sin equal to, or greater, than theirs.

Your immediate reply, stating that you have successfully terminated this heinous association, is eagerly awaited at SPUMES Headquarters.

That's the end of quotation, sir.

DETWEILLER: You read that gobbledygook very nicely, Kane. In a minute or two, I'm going to work myself into a towering rage. Before I do, I'd like to hear you comment on that Terragram in two or three well-chosen sentences, Kane.

KANE: I'd say, sir, that you'll have to be pretty careful; the SPUMES is

a large organization, with a lobby in every government-house in the Western Hemisphere. Your handling of this, sir, could have a direct bearing on future space-operations. A blunder could provide ammunition for the Anti-Space Bloc.

DETWEILLER: Thank you, Kane. That was very practical, although I think you over-emphasize the danger. Now, I think I'll grow angry. I want you to listen, Kane. If a person grows really angry, he thinks of all the wrong ways out of a situation. Ergo, when he calms down, the right ways are at his fingertips, due to the process of elimination. I do it many times, Kane, when faced with a nasty situation.

KANE: I'll try it sometime. Sounds good, sir.

DETWEILLER: Your comment, Kane, was the practical kind, which leaves the theory and philosophy to me. It would seem that modern civilization has too much time on its hands if it can find nothing better to do than to form damnfool societies. When every race in the Galaxy has been visited, Kane, and entered statistically in a book, it will be found that we Terrans have had more silly clubs, inane societies, asinine associations, and crazy collections of people dedicated to nothing more than filling office-space, cluttering the mails, killing time, and promoting more futile fads and general foolishness than any other race. Take this SPUMES outfit. It's membership consists of retired prostitutes, reformed gamblers, maiden ladies, prudish preachers, monied nincompoops, morons with time on their hands, and warped— (Eleven words are deleted here. Brig. Detweiler's description of the SPUMES membership grows highly colorful, but libelously unjust.—Ed.) How do I sound, Kane? KANE: Doing nicely, sir. Best voice I've heard you in since the time the scorpion got into your pressure-suit

out on Syrtis. You've put your finger on it, I think; let's have the wrong solutions now, sir.

DETWEILLER: I should resign my command in protest. I'm military governor of Mars, and such orders as I get come from Gen. Carter in Washington. I resent having a collection of crackpots trying to tell me what to do. I could send a stiff Marsgram to Carter, one to the Secretary for Space, and one to the President. Then we might get some sort of action in stopping this interference. I can sit still, doing nothing and saying nothing, and letting SPUMES stew. I could go out there and get Dr. Kent; or I could send you, Kane, or somebody, out to chaperone. If I could teleport, I'd go to Chicago, call a SPUMES convention and then I'd— (Brig. Detweiler's description of the havoc he would wreak on the membership of SPUMES, individually and collectively, approaches sadism, and cannot be recorded in this journal—Ed.)—taking Thornhill, Miss Claudia by the neck, and releasing it only after rigor mortis has—

KANE: You're shouting, sir.

DETWEILLER: Oh! Pardon me, Kane. Thank you. I feel much better. The solution must be at hand.

KANE: I don't see it yet, sir.

DETWEILLER: I'm going out to see Atterbury and Kent. It's the only thing that I can do. They are important scientists, and it—ah—behooves me, as military governor, to pay them my respects. Perhaps the right course will make itself more evident if I do that.

KANE: You're probably right, sir.

DETWEILLER: Will you phone down to Maintenance and have them warm up Bessie? I might just as well go now and get it over with. The damned sandstorm seems to be letting up.

KANE: Yes, sir. I'll do it right away, sir. Goodbye.

TO: Small
Relay Station
Luna

FROM: Mallory
Communications
GTHQ VENUS
July 13/TMT

SUBJECT: This message is a news release for Terra and Mars Frontier Hospital Medical Bulletin

It was the Hospital janitor who pressed the music-spools into use. He had been hungering for music, and so out of the misplaced shipment he dug all of Wagner's operas, the symphonies of Sibelius, Mahler, and Bruckner, besides the symphonic suites of Stravinsky. The hospital has an intercom system, and one night, as he cleaned up the laboratory, he inadvertently sent *Tannhauser* to all the rooms. The "Festmarch", "Pilgrims' Chorus", and the "Hymn to the Evening Star" had an amazing therapeutic effect upon the convalescing patients. Venii fever leaves its recovering victims listless and mentally-depressed.

The previously-mentioned selections had no effect whatsoever on those patients approaching a crisis. A little research showed that Wagner's *Rienzi Overture*, and anything by Bruckner and Sibelius, bolstered the morale of these victims, while the "Ride of the Valkries" from Wagner's *Walkure* proved to be effective on children only.

Haydn, Mozart, and Schubert are helpful to those suffering the first throes of the disease.

The janitor claims no credit and prefers to remain anonymous.

When musical therapy is not in progress, and the janitor is not playing over and over Brunhilde's Self-Immolation from *Gotterdammerung* by Wagner, a certain doctor seeks out

a spool of Prairie Oom Paul Pfeiffer and His Seventeen Boys of The Golden West. One night he had been puttering about the lab, listening the while to the previously-mentioned aggregation. When he was finished, he shut off the machine and the lights, and retired for the night.

About an hour later Prairie Oom Paul Pfeiffer and his Seventeen Boys of The Golden West began to render "There's a Love-knot in my Lariat" at full volume through the entire hospital. Someone ran to the lab. Lights blazed on. Shrieks of agony pierced the night.

The Larbarians from the hills had attacked the hospital, three of their numbers entering a lab window to attack from within. They had fiddled the music-distribution system to full volume.

The first doctor to the lab reports that one of the three was having convulsions; one was racing around in mortal terror; and the third just stood dumbly, bereft of his senses. "There's a Love-knot in my Lariat" had taken its toll.

Meanwhile, four convalescing patients felt compelled to commit suicide. To the strains of "There's a Love-knot", etc., they opened two first-floor windows and solemnly dived about a foot and a half into a hedge. The four white-clad figures atop the hedge and the terrific noise proved to be so disconcerting that the horde of barbarians about the hospital turned and fled in complete disorder.

The doctor, who likes Prairie Oom Paul Pfeiffer and his Seventeen Boys, claims no credit and prefers to remain anonymous. The hospital still requires an antibiotic, Dr. Kent, or both, although no deaths have occurred since the inception of musical therapy.

MARSGRAM

TO: Small
Relay Station
Luna

FROM: Kane
Communications
GTHQ MARS

SUBJECT: You will regard this as
ADVANCE NOTICE
OF TRANSMISSION
in re Shipment R14PL
(Compact) for relay to
Frontier Hospital
N/W Sector Venus

Brig. Detweiller visited Noaks, the laboratory of Prof. Reginald Atterbury. Dr. Carole Anne Kent and Atterbury are the co-discoverers of a new antibiotic, which has been named marsycin. The above-described shipment contains a small amount of the antibiotic and a number of cultures at various stages. Note that it carries the PL (perishable life) suffix.

This antibiotic is as yet untested, but it is not poisonous, and it is soluble in water. Miss Kent feels that it will probably not be effective against Venii fever, but will likely take its place in pharmacy as a specific for diarrhea in pigeons. However, it is the best she can do, under the circumstances.

Further note, Small, that this shipment is supposed to be relayed to Venus, not to Pluto, Halley's Comet, or Valhalla. Govern yourself accordingly.

TRANSCRIPT of a telephone conversation between Sergeant Kane, at Communications, and Brig. Detweiller, Administration Building, Mars.

KANE: Hello, sir. The shipment to Venus via Luna went out an hour ago. I go off duty in a little while, sir, and I was just wondering if there was any reply yet for SPUMES.

DETWEILLER: As a matter of fact, yes, there is, Kane. I just finished it. Here, I'll just read the body of it to you. You can write that ungodly heading required by regulations.

Ready?

KANE: Yes, sir. Shoot.

DETWEILLER: Here's the message:

In reply to your Terragram of July 11/TMT, whose tone and substance I deeply resent, I wish to report that the situation which offends your warped moral values has been cleared up, to the satisfaction of everyone concerned, I hope.

During my visit to Atterbury and Miss Kent, I drew their attention to what you deem to be their moral lapse. I suggested marriage, to which Atterbury replied: "What d'you say, Carole, old thing? We could jolly well give it a try for a month or two, what?" Go spume over that! I married them.

In future, please bear in mind that I'm the military governor of Mars, and any further messages from you, which indicate your attempted interference in Mars internal-affairs, will be committed to File X, the wastebasket.

End of message, Kane. What do you think of it?

KANE: I rather like it, sir. It's as neat a bit of fiction as I've ever heard, sir.

DETWEILLER: Fiction? Fiction? I worded it strongly, Kane, to discourage a recurrence of SPUMES snooping. Do you refer to the wastebasket part?

KANE: No, sir. I refer to the marriage part, sir. On page 7, appendix viii to Planetary Military Governors, Regulation 11, sub-section b states: *Two officers of rank not lower than colonel shall in the event no chaplain is in garrison, consider themselves authorized—*

DETWEILLER: All right, all right Kane! Of course I didn't marry them; I didn't even mention it. But understand this: that spacegram goes exactly as I gave it to you.

KANE: Yes, sir. I understand, sir.

DETWEILLER: What's your rank, Kane?

KANE: Sergeant, sir.

DETWEILLER: How long have you been a sergeant?

KANE: Three months, this time, sir.

DETWEILLER: What do you mean—this time?

KANE: This is the third time I've been a sergeant.

DETWEILLER: What happened?

KANE: Insubordination, sir.

DETWEILLER: Bear in mind, Kane, that majors, captains, and lieutenants are infallible; never talk back to them. If you must sound off, do it to a Brigadier. They've learned that they're far from perfect.

KANE: I'll bear it in mind, sir.

DETWEILLER: Do you think, Kane, that your fortunes might improve if you were promoted to Warrant Officer, Second Class?

KANE: Somehow, I think it would help, sir.

DETWEILLER: I'm offering you such a promotion. Bear in mind, Kane, that I'm not bribing you into silence over this matter. That wouldn't be necessary, I'm sure. Since you can quote trivial regulations from obscure appendices, it should be safe to assume that you know at least a third of the important rules in the regular manual. This means that you are a valuable man. Your promotion merely comes at an auspicious time, and it should serve to remind you that I have a good

deal of confidence in you. A warrant is next thing to a commission, and while it certainly won't serve to make you popular with the men, it might help to keep you out of trouble with your superiors. I have faith in you. KANE: Thank you kindly, sir; but if I'd been prudent, sir, I'd have never mentioned that regulation.

DETWEILLER: Glad you did. This way you won't be tempted to talk too much. Anyway, by the time Atterbury and Miss Kent get finished out there, they'll be ready to get married. The situation can have nothing but such a logical, satisfactory ending. But I had to leave them alone. Atterbury is a slow, gallantly-shy Englishman. He's susceptible, though; you don't have to be a Brigadier to see that. Miss Kent has a pair of Vickers Mark XV eyes, and every time she brings them to bear on the poor Professor, he almost wilts. However, love must be permitted to evolve at its own sweet will. Miss Kent will trick him into taking the offensive—or, failing that, she will suggest that their future scientific contributions be joint efforts. I am reminded of a little couplet, which was written by El Lobo, Tamale, or some other old, famous Spaniard: "Between a Professor's Yes and No, There isn't Room for a Proton to Go".

★



**A Powerful
Novelet of Man's
Destiny**

by Poul Anderson

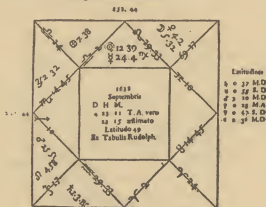
THE CHAPTER ENDS

*leading off the
January issue of*

**DYNAMIC SCIENCE
FICTION**

THE STARS IN THEIR COURSES

† Nativitas LUDOVICI XIV. Galliz & Navarra
Regis Christianissimi.



Horoscope of King Louis XIV, showing the square horoscope in use before the invention of the modern circular horoscope.

by L. Sprague de Camp

MAGIC IS still doing nicely in this scientific world of ours, as you can see by looking at astrology, with its 25,000 astrologers in the United States alone, eight American astrology magazines, and at least 15 newspaper astrology-columns, indicating perhaps about three million American devotees.

At this point somebody wants to argue that astrology isn't magic; it's science. He says that he purchased one of those magazines with a picture on the cover of a naked man waving a sword in the midst of a lot of symbols, and among the ads for dentures and

loaded dice he found the announcement of Hermes de Merlin, scientific astrologer. In return for a dollar or two, and his date and hour of birth, Hermes de Merlin told him things about himself that nobody could have guessed: that he was really a sensitive, poetic fellow; that within a year there'd be a change in his affairs; and so on. And it all came true. Wasn't that science?

Well, is it? People have been arguing the point for at least a couple of thousand years. Are the astrologer's clients seekers or suckers? But you can't settle such a question by calling

names; you have to examine the evidence. Let's do that.

Astrology as we know it today started in ancient Iraq, which we used to call Mesopotamia. There, on the great Euphratean plain more than 4,000 years ago, certain Akkadian priests began collecting astronomical observations, and using them to predict the future and to correct their calendar. Many primitive tribes possess a crude astrology; they draw inferences from the phases of the moon, and gibber with fear at a comet or an eclipse. But the Akkadian priests developed a more complicated and systematic method of stellar divination. Having no telescopes, and no idea of how the Solar System really worked, they were always making mistakes and being surprised. Once the astrologer Balasi reported mournfully:

"The moon is seen out of season,
Crops will be small.

On the twelfth day the moon is
seen together with the sun.

Contrary to the calculated time,
The moon and sun appear together,

A strong enemy will devastate the
land."

Poor Balasi not realizing he'd made a mistake in his computations, assumed that the universe was up to some sinister irregularity.

These priest-astrologers may have watched the stars from the ziggurats, great brick pyramids or setback towers attached to temples. The "tower of Babel" in *Genesis* is really the ziggurat of Babylon. Though nobody really knows, it's conceivable that the tale of the confusion of tongues might refer to labor-troubles during the construction of this ziggurat.

The Babylonian astrologers sent their sovereigns so many tons of reports on tablets of brick, that under the Assyrian and later Babylonian kings the accumulation of records

reached immense proportions. The astrologers liked to tell visiting foreigners that they'd been keeping these records over half a million years; nonsense, of course, but how could the tourists disprove such claims?

On two inventions of the Babylonian priests all later astrology is based: the zodiac and the theory of the divinity of heavenly bodies. Originally, the zodiac was simply the constellations through which the sun progressed in the course of a year. Different peoples, you see, have different systems of naming stars and constellations; our system comes from Babylonia.

TAURUS was probably the first zodiacal constellation to receive a name. In those days, the sun was in this group of stars at vernal equinox. An important date for farmers, this; and it's supposed that the stars of Taurus were named *Mulmullu*, "the Bull", to symbolize the plowing of spring, or fertility, or both. The other zodiacal constellations were filled in, little by little. We can guess that the Twins were named after the bright stars Castor and Pollux; the Scales for the autumn equinox; the Archer for the hunting season; the Sea-Goat, Fishes, and Jar (later for Water-carrier) for the wet winter months, and so on.

When those "sages" said that the sun was "in" a constellation, they meant just that. They thought of the universe as a pen with a dome over it; later, I think, as a hollow revolving ball, half full of water, with the earth a disk-shaped island floating upon this water, and at the center, Babylon. The heavenly bodies were fixed to the sphere's inner surface, around which the sun, moon, and planets crawled like flies on the inward side of a goldfish bowl. When the sun was in Taurus, it actually was passing among the stars of Taurus, bumping and scorching the poor little things.

The *signs* of the zodiac weren't invented till late in Babylonian history. The zodiac at that time was defined as the path wherein the movable heavenly bodies travelled; that is, a strip extending 9° on each side of the ecliptic (the sun's path). Into twelve sections they divided this belt, one for each month. Therefore a sign of the zodiac is an oblong patch of sky, 18° by 30° . The signs were naturally named after the constellations that occupied them then, in the second century B. C. To provide a permanent reference-point, the astronomer Hipparchos defined the signs' positions by taking the sun's place at vernal equinox as the first point of the Ram; in others words, as the boundary between the signs called "the Ram" and "the Fishes". The only thing wrong with this fine scheme was that it did not take precession into account.

The precession of the equinoxes is the circular motion of the earth's axis, like the wobble of a spinning top that is slowing down and about to topple. Hence the imaginary point to which the axis points—directly over the North Pole—moves in a circular track, about 47° across, and taking about 25,800 years to complete one wobble. Whereas 4,800 years ago the axis pointed towards the star Thuban, today it points (approximately) towards Polaris, and 11,500 years hence it'll point to Vega. Since the seasons, and the equinoxes and solstices that accompany them, depend upon the slant of the earth's axis, they move with that axis. You can see what that did to the zodiac. Because the signs were *named* after star-groups, but were *defined* by equinoctial points, the constellations and the signs bearing their names soon ceased to coincide. They move relative to one another about fifty seconds of arc a year, so that now they have moved about 29° , or almost one full sign. Hence the constellation Pisces occupies the sign Aries, the con-

stellation Aries the sign Taurus, and so on around the celestial clock.

This ever-widening discrepancy between signs and constellations has embarrassed astrologers for many centuries. They've generally offered the excuse that we have to base our calculations upon the zodiacal signs because the earth is influenced, not by the stars really, but by the signs. One could imagine that stars influence men's lives, but it's hard to conceive how patches of sky marked off by imaginary man-made lines exert such forces.

THE BABYLONIANS' other great astrological invention was the deification of the heavenly bodies. Although none of them knew what the sun, moon, and planets really were, some time between 1900 and 700 B. C. someone suggested that these bright bodies were abodes of gods, and should be given the names of their tenants divine. This naming was done by association of ideas. Thus the redness of Mars suggested blood, which suggested war, which suggested the war-god Nerigal. Therefore this planet was christened "Nerigal", and blamed unjustly for human belligerence. Venus received the name of "Ish-tar" after the goddess of love, because of its whiteness. Since the sun and moon already had gods of their own, Shamash (the Biblical Sampson) and Sin, Marduk, the god-in-chief of the Babylonian pantheon, had to content himself with the most conspicuous planet, Jupiter. Elusive little Mercury was named for the gods' magician and messenger Nabu, while Saturn was assigned to Ninurta, formerly a god of the sun, of war, and of farming of Nippur.

The Babylonians credited planets with influences you'd expect from their various gods. Ishtar naturally managed love; Nerigal, war; Marduk, politics. By primitive logic, a planet was

deemed to be strongest when rising or near the zenith; weakest when setting or retrograde—that is, apparently moving backward among the stars. We know that a retrograde planet is not really backing up; our earth is overtaking and passing it. But the Babylonians thought that planets really doubled back on their tracks, as if the gods who drove them (like chariots) suffered from spells of dizziness. By further analogies, they assigned to the heavenly bodies friendships and enmities, and supposed that their power was affected accordingly. Thus the approach of Venus to the constellation Orion presaged poor crops.

While this sort of reasoning, by analogy and association, is very characteristic of magic the world over, it has nothing to do with science. As astrology became more refined, astrologers offered several explanations for the supposed connection between celestial and earthly events.

By the oldest theory, the gods intervened directly on earth. A later form of this idea held that planets sent invisible "rays" or "vibrations" that affected terrestrial life. Another theory—that of the macrocosm and microcosm—taught that a sympathetic connection existed between the things of heaven and those of earth, a sort of magical gear-train that kept the events of each in a fixed relation to those of the other. This philosophy, which made men mere cogs in the cosmic machine, appealed to those who wanted excuses for their failures. Finally, another theory asserted that the heavenly bodies had no power of their own, but were used by the gods to warn men of things to come. Many centuries later, this hypothesis became popular with Christian thinkers, especially as an explanation for comets.

After the Persians conquered Babylon in 538 B. C., Babylonian astrology spread all over the civilized world, including India and, probably, China.

Although the priests of Babylon had confined their predictions to affairs of state and royalty, some bright lad now had the idea of making astrology available to the masses; perhaps some individualistic Greek. The Greeks, who had previously called planets by such names as *Stilbon*, "twinkling star" (Mercury), now renamed them after the Greek gods most nearly corresponding to the deities of Babylonia. Thus Nabu became *Hermes*, Ishtar *Aphrodite*, and so forth. In the same way the Romans later adapted the system to their own language and pantheon, which is how our own names, Mercury, Venus, and so on originated. The names of the signs of the zodiac underwent the same transformations: thus *Ku*, the Ram, became Greek *Krios* and Latin *Aries*.

The astrologers also worked out a system for modifying the supposed planetary influences according to the place of the planet in the sky. For instance, since Jupiter in those days got farthest north in Cancer and farthest south in Capricorn, this planet was deemed by magical pseudo-logic to be most powerful in the first case and least in the second. Planets in "conjunction" (apparently close together) were said to reinforce each other's good qualities; "opposition" (180° apart) had the opposite effect. When in the second century A. D. the Egyptian astronomer Klaudios Ptolemaios (or Claudius Ptolemy; no relation to the royal Ptolemies) wrote the bible of astrology, the *Tetrabiblos*, he added to the astrological scheme the unfortunate idea of Aristotle that four fundamental qualities—heat, cold, dryness, and wetness—accounted for all the properties of matter, and classified the heavenly bodies accordingly: Saturn, for instance, as cold and dry.

MORE AND more complications, such as "terms", "houses", and "Arabic points" were introduced into

astrology from time to time, until the system became so complex that no matter what happened to anybody, a competent astrologer could always find some heavenly event to account for it. Thus Greek and Roman astrologers concocted a vast scheme of spurious planetary qualities having nothing to do with the actual natures of the heavenly bodies, about which they knew very little.

Since Ptolemy's time, there have been only minor changes in the rules of astrology, mostly in the direction of greater complication.

Some skeptical souls always existed. Cicero, for example, wrote a great blast against astrology, *On Divination*, wherein he got off some good points. He pointed out that the "Chaldeans"—as astrologers were called—had promised Caesar, Pompey, and Crassus that they'd all live to a peaceful old age, whereas none did. But despite Cicero's arguments, astrology got a firm grip on the Roman world. Although the Roman Emperors occasionally legislated against astrologers (because it made them nervous to have people consulting the seers as to when the Emperor would die) these laws were not very effective. Neither was the implacable opposition of the Christian Fathers, even though the Christian Emperor Constantine had the astrologers of Constantinople flogged and paraded around the town on camels.

Eventually, Christianity was reconciled with astrology, and most medieval European scholars believed that the heavenly bodies exerted *some* influence on mundane affairs, though they disagreed as to how much. While the Florentine astrologer Cecco d'Ascoli was burned by the Inquisition in 1327, because he insisted on teaching an extreme doctrine wherein the stars ruled everything absolutely—even the career of Christ (whose horoscope Cecco cast)—in general, down to the end of the Middle Ages, astrologers rated

quite as respectable as members of other professions. Even the great sixteenth-century astronomer Johannes Kepler cast horoscopes for pocket-money, though with mental reservations. He remarked: "Astrology is the foolish daughter of a wise mother" (astronomy) "and for one hundred years past, this wise mother could not have lived without the help of her foolish daughter."

A great change took place, however, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the invention of the telescope and the work of Kepler and his colleagues revolutionized astronomy. The astronomers, finding the Babylonian assumptions about the goldfish-bowl universe and the divine planets entirely wrong, lost faith in astrology. This skeptical attitude gradually spread to other scientists and thence to the public, so that today you can truthfully say, not that astrology is dead yet, but that disbelief in it, at least, has become widespread.

ONE OF THE last "respectable" astrologers, William Lilly, arrived in London as a poor country boy about 1618, took a job as manservant, and studied astrology in his spare time under a drunken old wizard named Evans. Lilly married twice, and as both his wives were women of property, he was able to devote his resulting financial independence to the publication of almanacs and prophecies. During the English Civil War he brought out *A Profitable Conjecture of The success His Majestie or Parliament may expect in these their now-differences*, which sheds light upon Lilly's ability to keep out of trouble in dangerous times. He does not, as you might think from the title, say who will win, but instead he assures both King and Parliament that he loves them, and displays the most consummate trimming and straddling:

"If now some vipers be detected before we are quite undone, much good may be hoped; for Venus doeth apply to a Tryne of Mars; and this gives cause to hope well, and for some Message, or good News, or such like things, to be directed to His Majestie, of from him to us; at what time, if some misfortune intervene not, or some mischief befall not a principall Officer, our Expectations may be greater, and the Effects of what is then in Agitation much better, which I heartily wish." Who could take offense at this eloquent equivocation, even if he could understand it?

Towards the end of the seventeenth century a London shoemaker, John Partridge, took up almanac-making out of admiration for Lilly and prospered until Jonathan Swift levelled a lethal pen at him in a series of burlesques under the pseudonym of "Isaac Bickerstaff". The first of these, *Predictions for the Year 1708*, forecast the deaths of several prominent persons including John Partridge, doomed for March 29. After that date Swift issued *The Accomplishment of the first of Mr. Bickerstaff's predictions, being an account of the death of Mr. Partridge...* which told with pathetic particulars how Partridge on his death-bed repented of having hornswoggled so many victims with his astrological foolery.

Partridge, enraged, beat a boy whom he met in the street hawking Swift's pamphlets and crying: "A full and true account of Dr. Partridge's death!" The Stationers' Company, supposing the astrologer really dead, struck his name from their rolls, so that he could not issue his next year's almanac. He had trouble for years in proving that he was alive, for Swift and his fellow-wits Steele and Congreve kept up the game. Swift wrote an elegy, for instance, beginning:

"Here five feet deep lies on his
back

A cobbler, star-monger and quack;
Who to the stars in pure goodwill,
Does his best to look upward still.
Weep all you customers who use
His pills, his almanacks or
shoes..."

When Partridge finally got back into print he naturally lambasted his tormentors. Swift replied with a third pamphlet, *A Vindication of Isaac Bickerstaff, Esq.*, wherein he argued that Partridge indeed was dead regardless of anything Partridge might say. For instance: "...above a thousand gentlemen having bought his almanacks this year, merely to find what he said against me, at every line they read, they would lift up their eyes, and cry out, betwixt rage and laughter, 'they were sure no man alive ever writ such damned stuff as this.' Neither did I ever hear that opinion disputed; so that Mr. Partridge lies under a dilemma, either of disowning his almanack, or allowing himself to be no man alive."

WHILE SWIFT'S campaign didn't kill astrology, still it was a sign of the times. As a result of the astronomical revolution of Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton, astrology lost its intellectual respectability and has never regained it. From time to time, astrologers issue plaintive pleas to be taken seriously as scientists, but astronomers reject their advances with scorn.

This attitude on the part of astronomers is not so unreasonable as you might think. Astrology, you see, does indeed follow logically from certain assumptions—those of the ancient priests of Babylonia: the goldfish-bowl universe, the floating-island earth, and the planets divine. But all these assumptions were long ago exploded. Aristarchos of Samos in the third century B. C., and, nearly two thousand years later, Nicholas Copernicus

nicus, put the sun in the middle of the Solar System instead of the earth. Pythagoras or one of his successors suggested the roundness of the earth, and Aristotle proved it. And the telescope proved that the planets were neither, as Plato thought, divine fiery organisms; nor, as the Babylonians believed, divine automobiles which the gods drove about the goldfish-bowl, but balls of minerals like the earth. So, if you don't believe the Babylonians' assumptions, why take their conclusions seriously?

Most astrologers quietly ignored the Copernican revolution. Although a few have tried to work out systems of "heliocentric astrology", these systems would have turned the venerable pseudo-science topsy-turvy and hence never became popular. When more planets were found, beginning with Uranus in 1781, optimists saw the doom of astrology. But the astrologers smiled and said that these discoveries would merely make their "science" all the more exact.

Today, astrologers sometimes argue that astrology must be true because of the "metaphysical concept of macrocosm and microcosm". This concept, however, belongs to magic, not to science. It is usually summarized by the sentence "As above, so below," composed by the unknown author of a medieval treatise on alchemy, *De Mineralibus*, and expressing the idea that the universe is all interconnected by occult forces, so that, as the moon affects the tides, the stars must affect the lives of men. That is sound magic, but no more scientific than the late Voliva's flat-earthism.

However, if we object that the macrocosm-microcosm theory is a false and unscientific concept, the astrologers reply that, at least, astrology "works". Then if we propose to find out *how* it works, by scientific methods, the astrologers haughtily protest that theirs is an occult science having nothing to do with vulgar statistics.

What an astrologer means when he says that astrology works is that he can give astrological explanations for past events, and cite certain successful predictions. However, you can always find an astrological explanation for an event—regardless of whether astrology is true. For example, several planetary aspects, such as a Mars-Saturn conjunction, presage disasters dire. Since several such aspects occur every year, and likewise, in the normal course of events, several disasters, it is no trick at all to match disasters with aspects. It's a case of heads I win, tails you lose.

As for the correct predictions, such claims hold little water unless the astrologer keeps an equally careful track of his failures, which he never does. Anybody can make successful predictions if he tries often enough and doesn't mind making many false ones as well. Thus the late Gustave Meyer, an American astrologer, was keen enough about his success in predicting the death of Dillinger in 1934 and the election of Roosevelt in 1936. He was less enthusiastic about having picked Dempsey to defeat Tunney and Smith to surpass Hoover, and about promising the nation a woman president and a revolution by 1942.

The only way to prove the predictions of the astrologers is to collect a lot of them and keep them until they ripen. If you do this, you'll find that you have merely confirmed something the Greek dramatist Euripides said long ago:

"The best diviner I maintain to be
The man who guesses or conjectures best."

SOME YEARS ago, Professor Otto Bobertag experimented to see what astrologers could do under scientific control. He sent the birth data of five persons, without names, to four of the leading German astrologers, with requests for character analyses. The re-

[Turn To Page 83]

At last, one of science fiction's greatest
mysteries is explained!

THE DRY SPELL

by Charles E. Fritch

(illustrated by Milton Luros)

THIS IS my last story.
Do I hear wild applause from the balcony. No? Good. I'd much prefer a swansong with the gentle strains of a violin, not a Bronx cheer. Besides, you'll probably see other stories by me—at least in name. But I won't have written them—at least, not the real me, the brains behind the typewriter. No, not one word, not a precious syllable.

You've seen stories by me in all the magazines (perhaps without realizing it) under a dozen different names. I've gotten a great kick out of reading comments from readers like "You can't kid me, I know Joe Roe is really Bill Schmill." Know something? He's right. I'm both those guys—and lots of others, too. This, though, is my last story—the last one written by the real me. After this, things are going to be different, and a certain guy (mentioning no names, pen or otherwise) is going to have to write his own yarns from here on in, the lazy bum.

It's not that I'm being mean, you understand. It's just that—well, this isn't the kind of life for anyone to lead, not even me, so I'm not going to.

It started about two years ago when I was teaching business-machine operation at the University. I had two hobbies—working on complex computing-machines and writing science-fiction, neither of which at the time paid off in that green stuff that rich people say isn't everything.

It was while Millie and I were sit-

ting one summer evening on her porch swing that she started the line of thinking that was to change my life. Both our lives, in fact. Maybe three lives, if you'll pardon an innocent mechanical brain for having a life.

"The trouble with you," Millie said in an analytical tone, "is that you're trying to dash off in several directions at once, trying to be a jack-of-all-trades and not being good, really good, at anything."

"So?" I said. It wasn't a particularly bright remark, I'll admit, but at least it fit the occasion. "I don't want to give up any of them; I like them all. I like machines. I like working on calculators. I like writing science-fiction." I waved my hands in despair. "I'm stuck."

"Combine them," she suggested, as though she had come up with a world-shaking solution.

"I do," I told her. "I write stories of great big complicated computing-devices, ones that think and talk, and some that even know how to rhumba. But it's not the same thing. What I need is a twist of some kind, something that's different. Now take this story I'm working on right now; it's a story about a machine—"

"That's it!" Millie sat up straight, a smile bursting over her pretty face. "You write stories about machines. There's your twist. Reverse it. Make a machine that writes stories!"

I groaned. "Millie, please. A machine that— Oh, for goodness sakes." But I thought about it for awhile, and the idea got rosier. "Hm, that



I fed a batch of current issues into the machine.

would be rather convenient, wouldn't it."

WHAT A DEAL that would be.

Just feed paper and typewriter ribbons and erasers—no, erasers wouldn't be necessary—and carbon paper into the machine, press a button—and out would come a story ready for mailing. I pictured myself lying in a hammock in the shade of a tree, sipping cool drinks, while a machine beside me clicked and turned out story after story, for check after check from editor after editor. It was the pleasantest dream I'd had all day.

But I shook my head. "Can't be done."

"Why not?" she demanded.

I shrugged. "Well, it's—well, just because—well—"

"Well?" Millie is so impractical.

"Machines can't do something like that," I protested; finally, "you've got to have the human element."

"Nonsense!" Millie declared with enthusiasm. "Machines these days are almost human, and a lot of stories I read these days are pretty mechanical. If a machine can juggle figures it can juggle plot-elements and characterizations."

"But—"

"But me no buts, my boy, and get to work."

Is it any wonder I love Millie? She not only stands behind a guy, she gives him a terrific shove in the right direction. At the time, I wasn't certain it was the right direction; but I was seriously intrigued by the idea. A machine that produced finished stories, ready for mailing. Why, with a machine like that I could become another Zane Grey.

Actually, Millie had more on her mind than that. We'd been engaged for three and a half years, and I'd been putting off the marriage hoping for better things to happen to me, ei-

ther jobwise or paywise. Nothing had—at least, till now. Maybe she was getting desperate. Maybe I was, too.

Anyway, I got to work on the project right away. I had some old parts of antiquated supercalculating machines I'd been working on, and I managed to get others. I made changes in the relays, installed a typewriter as a basic part of the unit—this machine would handle words, not figures—and spent many long hours tinkering, putting into the machine the basic plots and the basic emotions necessary to its new career.

Millie dropped in often, giving me a hand, coffee and sandwiches, plus plenty of much-needed encouragement.

"Maybe I should try one million monkeys and one million typewriters," I suggested during a moment of depression; "some of them are bound to come up with something."

She shook her head. "Not selective. You'd get ninety-nine percent gibberish. Look at the waste of typing-paper. And the feed bills!"

"Not to mention the problem of sanitation," I added, and wished I hadn't.

I WORKED on the machine for intermittent periods totalling three months, fourteen days, sixteen hours, three minutes, and a negligible number of seconds—and then it was done.

"Well, now," I said, breathing a sigh of relief.

"Well, now—what?" Millie said beside me, going one step further.

"The acid-test; got a sheet of typing paper?"

She shook her head. "How about a slightly-used envelope?" she suggested, handing me a wrinkled letter from her purse.

"It'll do, I suppose."

I placed it in the slot and waited. After a few minutes gears whirled and the typewriter keys played their click-

ing melody. Seconds later, the envelope popped from the bottom.

"What does it say?" Millie asked eagerly. She was more excited than I was.

I read it aloud: "*Please adopt the professional attitude,*" it said, "*and submit stories on regular typing-paper, in an approved format.*"

"My God," I moaned, "don't tell me it's going to come out with rejection-slips, too."

"I don't blame it," Millie said, after considering the matter briefly. "This machine was constructed for a definite purpose—to write professional science fiction. How can you expect it to, if you don't supply the correct equipment for the job?"

I sighed. "I knew *human* writers were temperamental, but this is ridiculous."

"We can get some paper and carbons down at the corner store," Millie said, setting me back on the right track.

We rushed to the corner drugstore and bought two packs of typing paper and some carbons, then hurried back to the machine and deposited them in the slot.

"Well," I said impatiently, after a two-minute wait, "well, why doesn't it do something? What in the name of H. G. Wells is wrong now?"

"Be patient," Millie suggested. "It's probably thinking of a plot. . . Ah, there it goes."

It did. I watched, fascinated as gears geared themselves for the coming onslaught, then whirled swiftly into action. The typewriter keys went flying, and paper began dropping into the bottom box neatly typed.

I picked up the first sheet. It was, as I had expected, a title page. On it were the beginnings of a story called: "The Spaceman and His Dog."

I stared at it. "The Spaceman and His Dog?" I said, a little incredulously. I repeated it, and it didn't sound

any better the second time: "The Spaceman and His Dog?"

"I think it's a good title," Millie put in. "It has an element of humor, of pathos, of—"

"It's a stupid title," I said, "and what's more it's probably a stupid story, too. I'll even bet the dog is named Sirius."

Millie was puzzled. "What makes you think that?"

"Intuition," I told her. I read the first page and confirmed it. "Yep, here it is right here." I shook my head and crumpled the paper. "No, Millie, this'll never do. We've got to make a few adjustments, so—"

AN ANGRY whir came from the machine, interrupting me, and a sheet of paper came hurtling out onto the now-large pile of typewritten sheets. I picked it up, half-expecting an insolent note. But it was just another first sheet. Another angry whir came from the machine, then it continued its hum and clicking.

"That'll teach you a lesson," Millie said.

"Now, this is going too far," I muttered and picked up a monkeywrench. "No machine is going to whir at me and get away with it."

But Millie's loving arms were restraining me. "Hold on," she said, holding on. "This thing is likely to be your bread and butter for the next several years."

"With 'The Spaceman and His Dog'?" I said. "Don't be silly; where would I send a story like that?"

The machine had stopped its chatter. At my question, it began again. Millie and I looked at each other, wondering. A sheet of paper dropped out. I picked it up.

"For market analyses, feed late-issue magazines into slot for scanning," the paper said. "Please also include manuscript envelopes of two sizes and double-postage."

I blinked at the paper in my hand,

then at Millie, then at the machine. "This is incredible. Why, I bet if I put wheels on this, it could go down to the store and the post office and make its own purchases!"

"Maybe I should marry the machine," Millie suggested dryly.

"It'll never come to that," I assured her; and then I thought about the remark and decided it was a particularly revolting idea even to consider.

I GATHERED up copies of science-fiction magazines I had around the house, bought a few more at a local newsstand, and then pushed these, together with envelopes and stamps into the machine. The magazines I never saw again (evidently the machine digested them), but one of the envelopes came sliding out, fully stamped and addressed to *Smashing Science Fiction* magazine. Inside was the return envelope.

Millie said happily, "That must be the magazine most likely to accept your story. What's the matter?"

I solemnly contemplated the envelope. "Wonder why the machine didn't put the manuscript in the envelope and seal it?"

"Well, it wouldn't kill you to do something for the cause," Millie said unreasonably.

I brightened. "I know, it couldn't handle all that mucilage. Let's see, now—if I put a moist sponge about here..."

That was the beginning. I sent the story off to *Smashing Science-Fiction*, where it was immediately snapped up and published two months later. It was a rollicking success, and letters from readers came in praising it from Cucamoga to Fairbanks to Capetown. Hollywood bought up movie-rights and later produced a technicolor epic of it, co-starring Mickey Rooney and Lassie in the leading roles. The machine dashed off a sequel, "Return of the Spaceman and His Dog", followed

by "The Spaceman and His Dog's Puppies", with the same results. I was in.

The middle part you know, if you read science-fiction (and who doesn't?). The machine produced more stories than you could shake at an editor, and I had to operate under half a dozen or more pen names—names that you'd recognize if I listed them here. I married Millie, retired to a home in the country with a heated swimming pool and a French maid. And, of course, I had oodles of money—but that, after all, isn't everything. There's the sense of satisfaction in knowing I've created something of worth, something lasting, something for posterity.

The ending you're reading right now. The machine has reached what most writers reach at one time or another—a dry spell. Theoretically, it should be able to produce indefinitely, but as I may have mentioned earlier it's temperamental; you know how writers are, mechanical or otherwise. It sits glumly, longing for its old job back as a calculating machine in an office; none of this insecurity—work eight to five every day and be *done* with it, that's the ticket. So I

suppose I'll have to retire it and write my own stories.

I noticed this change of attitude when I came into the machine's private writing-room for three days in a row and found it resting contemplatively in its air-conditioned corner, its keys silent and unmoving, not a trace of a rumble in its well-oiled gears. Carefully, I checked on its supply of paper, ribbons, and other necessities; all was in order. Hope flared in me as it made lazy tentative movements for a few minutes, but when the paper dropped out, I saw it held not a story but a design made by typewriter-keys of a nude calculating machine.

I recognized the symptoms and sighed, for I had been half-expecting this. My fears were realized when, a short time later, it clicked out its final story. It began:

"This is my last story.

"Do I hear wild applause from the balcony. No? Good..."

It concluded with "not going to", but no other fanfare to denote the retirement from a fabulous and energetic career to a happier, more peaceful existence. It said simply: THE END.



"They don't speak Spanish, English, or Dutch, but I'm beginning to get the hang of their sign language."

LAST STAND OF A SPACE GRENADIER

Offhand, you'd say this was a real oldtime space-opera, from the title, wouldn't you? Well, you can trust Mr. Grinnell not to make such an obvious follow-through. In a sense, you might call the story space-opera, true — but on the other hand . .

by David Grinnell

(illustrated by Paul Orban)



I HAVE JUST finished disconnecting my television set. It's a fine 30" screen job, this year's model, and in perfect condition. If you want to buy it, I will sell it for far below what it would cost you anywhere. I am not interested in owning one anymore, and if you do not have any

children in your house, you can buy my set at a real bargain.

I have a fourteen-year-old boy of my own. He used to enjoy the television shows, particularly a certain science-fiction adventure serial, but he will have to confine his entertainment to reading now. He doesn't mind too

much, because he is a voracious reader of science-fiction magazines, too.

Several days ago, I was sitting at home reading a book and my boy Edward was sitting at the cleared dinner table hunched over a pulp magazine. Suddenly he gave a snort, said, "Huh!" and sort of looked up with an odd grin on his face.

"What's the joke?" I asked, out of curiosity. I am a reporter for the *Daily Argus* and by nature I always ask questions. Ed just grinned, came over with the magazine and showed it to me. It was a copy of a popular science-fiction monthly, and he had folded it back to the department called the Fantasy Legion.

The Fantasy Legion is one of those coupon-clipping clubs that some of these pulps run. You clip a coupon and they send you a colorful membership-card, and perhaps a lapel-pin. Usually it ends there, but science-fiction fans are different—as I know from having one in my house. These fans write letters and get to meet each other and really make branches and clubs out of these organizations. Thus the Fantasy Legion actually has about two dozen clubs that meet and correspond around the country, and it is just as serious about itself as the Boy Scouts.

What made Ed smirk was a little item that the Commanding Secretary (the editor, you realize) of the Fantasy Legion had printed at the head of his column that month. It seems that he had to expel two members "for attempting to undermine the Legion on behalf of a competing organization." This is taking a club like that real seriously.

"Do you know these two boys?" I asked Ed.

"Sure," he said. "Joe and Frank are nice guys. They're active members of the Space Grenadiers, and they were doing just what the editor said. They were joining up in the Fantasy Legion clubs and trying to talk the

members into making them over into Space Grenadier branches. In fact they joined my club, right here in this city."

"They're nice, you say? What's nice about trying to undermine your own club?" I asked.

Ed just laughed. "Aw, pop, it's all in fun. Joe and Frank just take themselves too seriously. Most of the guys belong to all the organizations at the same time. I do, myself." He reached into his pocket and pulled out an assortment of papers and junk, from which he separated three or four cards. I saw that he was a full-fledged legionnaire of the Fantasy Legion; a cadet of the Space Grenadiers; a patrolman of the Cosmic Guard; and a fellow of the National Fantasy Fellowship.

I turned over the Space Grenadiers card. It was issued by the Space Grenadiers TV Hour, sponsored every night between 5:30 and 6 P.M. by a well-known cereal company. The bearer pledged himself to abide by the code of the Grenadiers—which seemed to be a plagiarism of the Boy Scout Code with cosmic trappings—and also the bearer agreed to follow the program daily.

"Joe and Frank have organized a real branch of this club, and they were working very hard to get new members. I guess the Fantasy Legion got worried about it. But they're really nice guys; I haven't joined their club, but they belong to mine—or did until this happened."

I returned the cards to him and went back to my book. However, I am a reporter, and when I went into the office next day, I took my son's magazine along and wrote a little story about it, taking a facetious air and making it all out to be a funny item. The editor liked it, put a gag leader on it, and it found a small spot on the third page. Something like "Treason Runs Rampant in Interplanetary Circles!" You know.

THAT WOULD have been that, except that a day or so later, I was down at the city hospital when a boy was brought in suffering from amnesia. He was a nice-looking fifteen-year-old, well-dressed, but with an apparent total loss of memory. They identified him by a card in his wallet. The name on it was Frank Wainer, and the card was a Space Grenadiers membership-card, certifying the bearer as a full-fledged Grenadier. I remembered his name as that of one of the two boys involved in the Fantasy Legion expulsion.

I saw the boy and it was puzzling. There were no bruises on him, nothing to indicate accident. His parents were there, but he simply did not recognize them. He sat quietly, resigned, and unresponsive. I talked to his folks, and they said he had been acting worried the past month or so; he had been restless nights, but last night he had slept soundly. He had seemed dazed when he woke up, started to school, and had been found on the streets a few hours later in this condition.

I got the editor to assign me to this case, because I had an inside track, apparently. I got my son to give me the address of the other chap, Joe Aitkens, who had been kicked out of the Fantasy Legion, and I showed up at the Aitkens house about half past three. I found him home, as I had figured, for his school hours were the same as my son's. His parents, fortunately, were not at home; I didn't want to get the boy into any home trouble, and they would certainly have thought it strange for a newspaper-reporter to be querying their son.

At first, Joe was reluctant to talk. He was about my own son's height, a year older, but he knew Ed and liked him. It didn't take me long to establish the fact that the two boys were a lot alike. They were both science-fiction fans, and that must be the ticket. After I had told him I was Ed's father, and that I just wanted to talk to him

about the Space Grenadiers and about Frank, he seemed to warm up slightly.

It was obvious that the boy was cagy. He said there wasn't anything the matter. They were very serious about their club; they thought the TV serial was "swell"; they wanted to earn themselves special "Commander" cards in the organization. He explained to me that you began as a cadet, that you filled out certain questionnaires about your science-knowledge, or else started a club, or did something special, and they would advance you to trooper, and then to grenadier, and finally to commander. He and Frank were in the Grenadier class. He admitted that he didn't know of anybody in the Commander class, and what had been exciting him was the possibility of being the first to make it, and therefore being mentioned on the TV program.

But it was also obvious that he was concealing something from me. Several times he would start an answer, stop, rethink his sentence, and start over. He claimed he didn't know what caused Frank's breakdown. He claimed, after hesitation, that it must have been schoolwork.

I DIDN'T press the boy further. That evening I sat with Ed and watched the Space Grenadiers program. It was exciting, interesting. It concerned the adventures of a handsome young man who was a captain in some future war against Martians, or Jovians, or something. Strictly the Buck Rogers-Flash Gordon technique, brought up to date with TV trappings and spectacular effects. Throughout it I was annoyed by constant flashes of light which seemed to keep on occurring in the background. Ed explained to me that these were supposed to be meteor flashes. "They go on all the time in space, pop," he said.

"They do, eh?" I answered. They almost gave me a headache, and I wondered how meteors could flash in

airlessness. You have to allow television-producers a certain poetic license, I suppose.

On a hunch, the next day I went down to the city hospital again and checked their records. They had had six cases of breakdowns in the last four months involving boys between thirteen and seventeen. One was a case of a boy who had gone unconscious and remained in that state for almost a month, when he pulled out of it. He was still in the hospital, but they expected a full recovery. Two others were temporary amnesia cases. One had been removed to an asylum; two were dead.

As best I could, I checked up on each of these boys, those in the hospital, those released, those dead. In five of the six cases, the boy had been a member of the Space Grenadiers. The sixth case, I guess, may just have been accidental.

Now I was really worried. As a father, frightened. I went around to see Joe Aitkens again. I caught him just home from school. This time I was not easy on the boy. I confronted him with the evidence. He admitted that he knew two of the mental cases, one of them a dead one. It was those two who had caused Frank and himself to redouble their efforts to build up the Space Grenadiers club, and led to their trouble with the Fantasy Legion.

I didn't see the connection. "Why did you pick on the Fantasy Legion members? Couldn't you just convince boys on the street?"

Joe looked away from me. "We needed recruits in a hurry, but they had to have the right outlook. They had to be a certain kind of imaginative guy, already active fans. We couldn't afford to wait."

I was getting a bit angry. This was deadly serious, and there was something damnably wrong here. I restrained my temper, became confidential. I explained to Joe that he should

remember that boys of his age were not alone, that they could always call on the adult world for assistance, and if there was a real need for it, they would always be able to find understanding somewhere. I said that the Space Grenadiers program was put out, written by, acted by adults. That if there was something fishy, it must be something that could be better handled by adults. Joe almost broke down and cried then; it was clear to me that he'd been carrying a heavy burden on his conscience—doubled since Frank's breakdown.

Finally he let loose. He told me about the Space Grenadiers and himself. I don't believe he expected me to believe him, but I did.

H E'D BEEN watching the Space Grenadiers Hour ever since it started, which was about a year ago. He was a real fan, never read anything save science-fiction, had no friends other than fans. He said he believed in science-fiction, by which he meant that he believed in space-flight, in other worlds and their inhabitants, in the reality of those things. Naturally the TV show was a source of great fascination, or near-reality.

"I started dreaming science-fiction about three months ago. I don't think I was aware of it for a while until I realized I had been having the same dream every night for a week. The dream was this:

"I would be standing by a port window in a spaceship. I knew it was a spaceship, in the way you know things in dreams. I would watch the stars, and I would watch the flickering meteor lights, and I saw all sorts of space-battles going on. There was a war in space, and I was watching it from a transport-ship.

"I never could look around me; I never remember seeing the inside of the ship I was on. But I knew, like you do in dreams, what was around me. I knew I was standing in a crowd of



guys like myself. I knew they were looking over my shoulder, jamming me in. I couldn't move, we were packed so tight. I knew we were recruits, waiting for our turn to go into battle."

Joe stopped, put a hand to his head, looked a little sick. I waited silently, sitting on a chair before him. I felt worried for him, worried for Ed, sort of frightened. After a moment, Joe continued.

"I had this same dream every night. It was always like that. There were battles going on, spaceships exploding, rays, and always meteor-flashes. And I was always pushed tightly against that port, surrounded by recruits, waiting, waiting to be called.

"This dream never stopped. It has been going on now for maybe three months. But I learned more. Gradually the pressure eased up. I realized that some of the men behind me were going off on duty. I realized that one night my call would be come soon."

"What sort of duty? What were you expected to do when you were called?" I asked softly.

Joe looked at me with pain in his eyes. He whispered slowly, "Kamikaze piloting. Space grenadiers for real. We were waiting to be sent out in atomic-bomb-loaded rocket ships to crash them into enemy ships, or enemy planets. We were going to sacrifice ourselves, just like the Japanese suicide pilots did; that's what we were waiting for."

I sat back, cold chills down my spine. "Now wait a minute. You *knew* this; couldn't you do anything to stop it?"

Joe looked at me; now that he had stated his worry, he became frank. "Look, I talked it over with Frank. He had been having the same dream—the exact, same dream. We studied it, analyzed it. We came to the same conclusion. We had to find substitutes. If we could convince *them* that we were good recruiting-agents, maybe they wouldn't send us out when our call came."

"*They? Them?* What do you mean? Who are you talking about?"

JOE SWALLOWED. "Look, sir, you have got to understand. We couldn't be having the same dreams if there wasn't something real behind it. We knew about those guys who had the nervous breakdowns. There were some in other cities, too; we know from the fan magazines and correspondence. They were all Space Grenadiers. What Frank and I figured out was this:

"We decided that there is *really* a war going on somewhere in space. Not in this system, we don't think, because we could never identify any of the planets we saw in our dreams. Now, in this war, the people that are fighting it use recruits from other worlds—worlds they probably consider backward from their science-viewpoint, worlds like Earth. They don't seem to need us physically—maybe our bodies wouldn't survive—but they do need our minds. They need minds to direct these suicide, atomic-bomb rockets that they shoot at each other. The same as the Japanese Kamikazes, where a fellow would pilot his own bomb-loaded plane into a U. S. battleship, kill himself as a patriotic duty. Only these people don't feel like killing themselves if they can get someone else to do it.

"So this Space Grenadiers program

is sort of backed by them, though I don't know how you could prove it. Maybe the guys that write and direct it are being moved by dreams or something; they probably don't know what they are doing. Anyway, we *do* know that certain fellows who watch it regularly start to dream this dream, and some of them come to a terrible end. We think, Frank and I, that when they get their breakdown, or go crazy, or drop dead, is the night they get their call and are sent out on a suicide-mission. Maybe their brain can survive the shock; sometimes it does, most often it doesn't.

"But anyway that's the way it works. Of course it doesn't have that effect on most of its watchers. Maybe nothing happens to 99% of the kids that watch it; they need only certain kinds of minds, science-fiction minds, specially imaginative, like me and Frank and your son Ed. So that's when Frank figured out that if we would get the Fantasy Legion members here to become interested in the Space

Grenadiers program, we'd be bringing *Them* a lot of special high-type recruits. Maybe then they'd let us go—or anyway figure we were of some real value to them.

"But it didn't work. Frank must have got his..." and then Joe broke down and cried. He was scared through and through. I don't blame him; I'm scared through and through myself.

I don't know what you can do about it. I wrote to the TV station and I wrote to the cereal company that "sponsors" it, but I'm realist enough to know they aren't going to pay any attention to crank letters. I'm just a reporter on a newspaper; I don't have any special influence and I only have enough money to support my family—none to become a crusader.

I have disconnected my own TV set, and you can buy it from me cheap. If you want a good set in perfect condition, write me. But I won't sell it to you if you have any children.



Humanity was protected —

from violence,
from emotion,
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Rx: Jupiter
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You'll find it in the
January issue of



FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION

Valler had the right approach to the problem, but . . .



THE MONSTER OR-- THE MONSTER?

by Eando Binder

(illustrated by Milton Luros)

“WELL, ANDREW VALLER! *Enjoying* your study of interplanetary specimens?”

Feeding the animals, Valler turned in surprise. His biological research-camp was isolated, deep in the hills, by Earth security-regulations. He worked alone, without assistants, and visitors seldom came. Most people didn't like this particular work, dealing with monsters of many worlds.

“Hello, I didn't expect company—” Valler choked off, staring around; there was no one in sight. Valler stood a moment frowning, then shrugged. He was a man of snap judgments. There was no one there; ergo, no one had spoken. Period.

Valler went back to feeding the animals, taking his usual delight in holding the food beyond their reach and letting them slaver and whine for it, while he goaded them with a blunt iron bar.

“Yes, you heard a voice, Andrew Valler,” came again. “Don't ignore me; that is rude you know.”

Valler dropped his goad. This time there was no mistake. It had been as clear as a bell in his ears. . . no, not in his ears. In his mind.

Telepathy. But who—?

Valler stiffened as he slowly looked around at the dozen cages in open air, holding specimens of native animal-life from a dozen different worlds.

The question suddenly came out chillingly different.

What had spoken to him, by telepathy?

Valler had thought, up till now, that he was studying only animal-life, comparable in low brain capacity to earthly mammals. His skin crawled; now it was obvious that one of the planetary creatures was intelligent.

But which one?

"Yes, which one of us?" rang in cold, clear telepathic tones, tinged with that other unique trait of intelligent life—sarcasm. "We all look alike to you—that is, unhuman. Which one is I, Erko Kajj?"

Valler gripped his gun, peering at each cage closely. Yet how could he tell, visually? They all looked monstrous to human eyes. Scaly, simian, piscine, winged, furred, fanged—each appeared to be a dumb brute in outward form.

Obviously reading his thoughts, the voice again slid into his mind. "Not one of us looks manlike or brainy. Which one is I, Erko Kajj? Which one?"

Valler was bending his head, like a person trying to determine where a voice came from. Perhaps...

"It won't work," informed Erko Kajj immediately. "Your ears can judge the direction of sound, but a mind cannot orientate telepathic impulses."

It was true; the telepathic voice seemed to come from everywhere—and nowhere. It had no more "direction" than any thought stealing into the mind. Valler grunted.

Clothes! It was a mark of all intellectual races...

"Not a stitch on me," bubbled Erko Kajj, gleefully. "When I was captured by your hunters, on my world, I was sleeping after a swim."

"What world?" shot back Valler quickly, speaking aloud, knowing his thought would carry along.

"Clever, aren't you? Thought I'd answer innocently, not seeing the trap. All your specimens being from different worlds, you would then know which I was. Come, Earthling, that was childish. You are dealing with a brain equal to yours; try something else."

Valler whipped out his gun. "Simple," he snapped, grinning. "You forget one thing. I can't pick *you* out, but if I must, I can kill all twelve animals, and that would include Mr. Erko Kajj. Laugh *that* off."

"Frankly," came back calmly, "it's your only chance. Within an hour, I will figure out the lock-mechanism to my cage, and open it with telekinetic force. I will be free to kill you. Yes, your only chance to kill me is by slaughtering all the specimens. You'll never *pick* me out, stupid."

VALLER put back his gun, seething. That did it, the insult, the sneer in the tone. That unsufferable self-assurance. "Killing would be too easy for you," Valler growled. "I'll beat you the better way, in a battle of wits."

"Perhaps I tricked you into taking that attitude, to save myself from immediate death."

"I know you did," spat Valler. "But that's going to make it all the sweeter, getting you the hard way, making you eat your words. So I'm too dumb to pin you down, eh? We'll see!"

"Yes, we will see," agreed the unknown enemy. "Well? Which one am I, braggart? Which one?"

Which one? Which one? Which one?

It gonged in Valler's head in the following minutes, as he brooded silently, rejecting useless ideas. Then he jumped up and ran into his cabin-workshop for biological research. Smiling crookedly, he wheeled out an instrument.

"Know what this is, my friend?" he said, addressing himself to the twelve

cages and animals in general. "The fluororadarscope. Takes X-ray shots of the insides of animals, shows them on the screen, by radar-focus. All I do now is examine each of the critters for one certain internal organ."

"The *brain!*" came back, and Valler laughed; for the first time, Erko Kajj's tone was not mocking, not self-assured.

"Scared?" said Valler gloatingly. "The brain, of course, is a dead giveaway. It's almost always more convoluted and *larger* in any intelligent being, in proportion to body size. Try and get out of that corner, chum."

There was no answer.

Valler dismissed them quickly, one after another, with the X-ray probe. Tiny brains in huge hulks, most of them. He laughed at the peanut brain in the miniature horse-sized saurian from Io. And the fist-sized cranium of the great green lion-bear from Hyperion.

Then he saw the huge brain on the screen, almost human size.

Valler strode to the cage labeled—*Furred Tortoise, Titan*. In its hard-shelled body of mere goat-size, covered with incongruous silky hair, you would least expect intelligence. But its leonine head, out of all proportion to its body, held a cunning big brain of human capacity. And Valler thought he could see now, close up, how its lidded eyes held age-old wisdom.

"Any last words, Erko Kajj?" said Valler grindingly, as he used the iron

goad to whack it several times, making it cringe back.

Silence.

"Scared dumb, eh?" mocked Valler savagely, extracting revenge for his aching nerves. "Thought you were smart, superior. Thought you could play cat-and-mouse with me, driving me wild before you finally broke loose and got me. But your big brain still only amounts to a half-witted Earthman, see? Goodbye, Erko Kajj of Titan."

Valler's gun barked. He pumped the whole magazine of atomic bullets into the hairy turtle. Reptilian to the core, it made no sound as it slumped, kicked, and lay still.

Valler turned—and shrieked.

A silent form stood behind him, out of its opened cage. It knocked the empty gun from his hands, seized him in its claws.

"But you *can't* be Erko Kajj," whispered Valler. "You only have a brain the size of a peanut... I saw it... I saw it..."

"You had the right idea," and the telepathic voice of Erko Kajj was near to pity, "but you forgot one thing about your own dinosaurs, that they had a second brain at the base of the spine. That one, you see, is my *real* brain."

Valler looked into the small cold eyes of the miniature Ioan dinosaur and saw death.

★

Remembered Words . . .

Originals will be sent to Norman J. Clarke, Ron Anger, and Sid Sullivan. We'll select them, since we haven't any left from the November SFQ.

And this winds up the originals sweepstakes. The returns on our poll in *Future* and *Dynamic* confirmed my suspicions that the gilt has worn off the practice — suspicions originally aroused by the apathy of so many of the winners. So, we'll follow the suggestions of those who voted that all originals be held for conventions, etc.



Readin' and Writin'

FANCIES AND GOODNIGHTS, by John Collier. Doubleday, 364 pp., \$4.00.

John Collier, who must be by now somewhere in his early or middle forties, was once an impudent young man with a poet's heart and an engagingly apelike countenance. These traditionally Hibernian qualities have, before this, been the making of great minstrels, warriors, kings and rogues; the combination cannot help but explode into things utterly new and astonishing—into heads carved off with quillpen nicety, or words chopped out with an axe.

Except he take a club or a dirk in his hand, such a man is doomed to be disappointed in love, tyrannized by relatives, gulled once a week by the unscrupulous, and mocked at by philistines, but give him a pen, and he will get his own back twice over.

There was a young man who was invariably spurned by the girls, not because he smelt at all bad, but because he happened to be as ugly as a monkey. He had a good heart, but this soured it, and though he would grudgingly admit that the female kind were very agreeable in shape, size, and texture, he thought that in all other respects they were the most stupid, blind, perverse, and ill-natured bitches that had ever infested the earth.

This is the first paragraph of "The Devil George and Rosie," one of the fifty stories in this volume, in which ugly, good-natured and gullible persons figure at length. Clearly enough, all these persons are Collier himself; very infrequently one of them, like George, is allowed to take the principal role; one or two are apes; but most of them appear as demons.

"Hell," said Percy Bysshe Shelley, "is a city much like London;" Collier has made

it as easily reached and very nearly as familiar:

In Hell, as in other places that we know of, conditions are damnably disagreeable. Well-adjusted, energetic, and ambitious devils take this very much in their stride. They expect to improve their lot and ultimately to become fiends of distinction.*

This is an ill-founded hope, however; Collier's demons vary somewhat in appearance and disposition, but there is nothing really objectionable about any of them; on the contrary, they are rather likeable fellows but in their pure state hopelessly incompetent to meet the challenges of modern living. The nastiest of the lot is old Tom Truncheon of "Fallen Star," from which the quotation above is taken; and even he, after psychoanalysis, becomes well-tailored and taillessly respectable, and makes a tidy fortune in Wall Street.

Not as much can be said for all the human characters in these stories, which also abound in spiteful and tight-fisted male relations, fat hennaed sluts, murdered wives and the like; however, there is a bit of Collier in the worst of them, and whatever they are doing—poisoning or disemboweling each other, leaping from the top of a skyscraper, posing as a specimen of the taxidermist's art—is done with the utmost grace and aplomb.

Nearly all of these stories belong to one canon: the conventional romantic fantasy, or domestic tragedy, or sophisticated love story, with the fur side in.

Nothing ever works out even approxi-

* This word appears as "friends" in the Doubleday text; printers, as we all know, are the lily-purest and most angelic of mortals, and I doubt if there is one of them alive who knows what a fiend is.

mately as expected; every turn of the plot is a wild (but remorselessly logical) tangent; wives become husbands, the innocent are guilty, jinn equals Aladdin. Collier takes an innocent childish delight in pulling the rug out from under his reader, sometimes before he is fairly on it, as in the opening sentence of "Pictures in the Fires:"

*Dreaming of money as I lay half
asleep on the Malibu sand...*

These first lines are an especial pre-occupation of Collier's (and the last lines as well); there is nothing like them anywhere else in the literature; they are sandbags between the eyes. "Great Possibilities," for example, opens as follows:

*There are certain people who do not
come to full flower until they are well
over fifty. Among these are all males
named Murchison.*

Collier, besides, was quick to learn the unpalatable truth that bitterness does not make art until it is transmuted into satire, that tragedy bores us unless it is unnecessary, that beauty is like Pabulum without a touch of the ludicrous. Only twice in fifty stories—in "The Lady on the Grey" and "Special Delivery"—has he made the error of taking himself too seriously; and these are stories that would shine in other company.

In addition to Hell and its environs, Collier has taken a great interest in the domestic scene. In this volume there are two stories in which a man kills his wife (the classics "De Mortuis" and "Back For Christmas"), one in which the job is carried out for him by an obliging monster; one in which he does his best, but owing to a regrettable misunderstanding is hoisted by his own mushroom; and one in which two soul-mates simultaneously poison each other for the insurance; this without taking any account of slaughtered uncles and nephews. He has also done incredible things to the triangle, as well as the quadrangle plot, and has turned his attention upon M. D.'s, dentists, psychoanalysts, bohemians and other curious fauna in London, Hollywood and New York. Some of these tales have the dramatic simplicity of an anonymous anecdote, and in fact one of them (not included here) appeared as such, condensed and shorn of its author's name,

in a recent volume of Bennett Cerf's.

Seventeen stories of the present collection are new to hard covers; among the rest are such time-honored tales as "Bottle Party," "Evening Primrose," "The Frog Prince," "Thus I Refuse Beelzy," "Green Thoughts" and "Mary." Three others demand special mention and a category of their own: three tours de force, conversation-pieces in which the implications are everything, the events visible onstage nothing: "Little Memento," "The Chaser" and the finest short murder mystery ever written, "The Touch of Nutmeg Makes It."

In nearly all of Collier's work the influences of poet and ape are equally felt, which is to say that these stories are brilliantly balanced on the tension between farce and tragedy.

It is the business of the satirist to make his readers forget that he is a living human being, susceptible of hurt, able to love or hate singlemindedly and without reserve; but in one story, "The Steel Cat," Collier's art is something more than satire. Here the ape speaks alone; the poet has been temporarily won over, and is present only to contribute the artistry that makes the death of a mouse a more shameful and terrible thing than the death of Desdemona.

Elsewhere, however briefly, the poet also is audible alone; and since, after all, the poet is intrinsic and, unkillable whereas the ape is only an accident, I think it fit to end with this one last quotation, the opening lines of "Variation On a Theme," in which one is described in the terms of the other:

*A young man, with a bowler hat,
cane, flaxen mustache, and blue suit,
was looking at a gorilla in a zoo. All
about him were cages floored with
squares of desert. On these yellow
flats, like precise false statements of
equatorial latitudes, lay the shadows
of bars. There were nutshells, banana
skins, fading lettuce; there were the
cries of birds who believed themselves
mewed up because they were mad, the
obeisances of giraffes, the yawns of
lions. In an imitation of moon crags,
mountain goats bore about ignobly
eyes that were pieces of moon.*

—Damon Knight

Correction ~

L. Sprague de Camp writes: "In my book-review in *Science Fiction Quarterly* for November, 1953, the geneticist alluded to in connection with Herbert J. Muller's *The Uses of the Past* is not a man of the same name as the author of that book. His name is Herman J. Muller."

THE LAST HERO

by Bryce Walton



Hendricks didn't care why he wanted to go out to the stars, didn't care what this desire revealed in him. He just wanted to go, and no one was going to stop him . . .



THEY DIDN'T want to go to the stars. None of the old crowd, none of his friends. No one anywhere seemed to understand it. Even Maria didn't want him to go. And that was the least understandable; Maria had always taken so much pride in his achievements.

With anything involving the conquest of the last frontiers of space, Major Hendricks had been first; and he would be the first man to the stars.

There they were though, all not wanting him to go, working at it, all against him, using every wile short of abducting him and hiding him somewhere to keep him from man's final and greatest adventure.

Tonight Maria was even wearing practically nothing, as a distastefully-obvious way of persuading him to stay on Earth, where anyone but an idiot belonged.

"You're pushing your luck," Lieutenant Jake said. He had said the same things so many ways so many times before.

"The big hero," Michelson said. "The big blowoff!" That was lousily-

obvious the way Capt. Michelson always was.

Colonel Comden at least had dignity, with his size and lean face and greying hair, and the fact that sometimes he had a nasty logical persuasiveness. "Look here, Major," he said to Hendricks. "Space? What in hell for?"

Major Hendricks found his laugh seeming slightly uneasy as he sipped his scotch and took two long easy strides to the wall-window that opened out over Washington. Maria slipped near and put her arm around his lean waist, and her glinting brunette hair nestled cozily as ever under his arm.

"Like the man said who finally climbed Everest," Hendricks said. "Because it's there."

Comden's laugh wasn't uneasy. "A mountain *is* there. It has a top to reach, even a view. But where's *there* when you're heading into space, Major? You find one sun, there's always a million more. A billion more after that. They never end, space never ends. Once you start, Major, when are you *there*?"

The uneasiness increased and Hendricks felt the rage of cornered emotion seeking release. Only Comden could do it to him. "*Because it's there.*"

Really, what kind of answer was it, after all? It was full of philosophical evasions, but Comden cut through that stuff.

Comden moved toward Hendricks—a big, impressive uniformed figure of conviction, beneficent and a little condescending. His face was slightly flushed with Hendricks' bourbon. Maria, sensing a strong ally who needed the complete stage, moved away and into the shadows. Lord, she was beautiful, Hendricks thought. Why hadn't he ever convinced himself he ought to marry her? She didn't want him to go, but she'd said she would go along if he didn't give up the idea. No spirit, nothing but frightened martyrdom. But later, she might feel what he felt about the stars.

"See here, Major!" Comden almost growled. "What's the real reason? Don't be a damn fool! They've sent up monkeys. Rats. There's no challenge of the unknown up there; we know what it's like. The telemeters and servometers have already been there. They've mined, explored, covered it. We know Mars and Venus, and the rest of those balls of clay, as well as we know our own earth—without ever having set a foot up there!"

"We've found out everything," Hendricks said, "except how it feels to be out there." He looked up at the stars. "The rats can't tell, and the monkeys won't."

Michelson laughed. "Some guys never grow up. Even a fifty-year-old Major, who's pushed rockets faster than any other man. Even a distinguished Major with greying hair can still be obsessed with what's behind the looking-glass. Now you're a sucker for the never-never land of zero gravity." He sat down in drunken heaviness and continued studying Maria with desire. "And anyway, Major, maybe Maria doesn't want to go through the looking-glass, into a sub-zero wonderland."

Hendricks turned. "That's her busi-

ness, some of mine, and none of yours!"

"Whoa—whoa there," yelled Lt. Jake and slopped cognac all over his girl friend Lara—who was also against Hendricks going to the stars—but who never said anything, even now. "Hey, wait, you guys! Cut that kind of stuff. Listen, Major, you can trust me, believe in me. And I'm telling you, you're crazy as hell!"

"Thanks, buddy," Hendricks said.

"But it's a fact! What about the psyche tests?" The immediate silence was more painfully accusing and condemnatory than all the yelling that had gone before.

"I've been through that testing-mill already, years ago," Hendricks said. He turned his back to them and poured another double-shot of scotch on the rocks. The glass was shaking slightly. He didn't turn around.

"But you'll be out there for years, that is—if you ever can get started back," Michelson said. "I must admit a deep respect for Maria. But even with her, what's going to happen to you—years bottled up in a metal capsule?"

"In the eternal high noon," whispered Comden, "where nothing ever changes, except some needles on some dials." Hendricks could hear Comden's long military strides behind him. Comden whispered, "The reason you don't take the psyche screening, Major, is because you know that no human being could pass it. No human being can stand it for one year out there, let alone more. You'll be a raving psycho in no time!"

"Sure," Jake said. "And as long as you know that's inevitable, maybe that's what you're looking for."

HENDRICKS felt what he had called rage, long-suppressed, at the negative attitudes, the ridicule, the arguments, the red tape that had kept him from his dream so long.

What was happening, or had al-

ready happened to everybody? No more wars, no more excitement, no frontiers in easy reach. Everybody scared, pretending they'd reached a balance and that it wasn't fear, but happiness. Everything locked in stasis, a mechanical malaise. Like rotting Rome—only with no frontiers left, no barbarians waiting on the fringe of decay. Endless rounds of parties and drinking, and easy safe adventures in childish games!

No more frontiers to call men's spirit out of frightened bounds. That was their excuse.

"You're all a bunch of cowards," he shouted all at once. He wanted to smash Michelson's thin face in. "That's it! The big frontier, the big adventure—it's too much for you. You've quit, all of you; everybody's quit!"

"We're scared!" grinned Michelson. He winked at Maria. "Why should a brave hero go out there for nothing, when nobody cares?"

"You running away from something, Major," James mumbled.

"The Russians still might attack, give you some excitement," Comden said.

"Sure," Hendricks said. He still hadn't turned around. "With tele-meters and electronic eyes. You guys anxious to prove your bravery in the great button-pushing contest?"

"Let's drop this ridiculous wrangling and get down to cases," Comden said. "Nobody thinks much about space anymore. That's old-hat escape stuff. The motivation's gone; nobody wants to run away anymore. There's still plenty to do right here—"

"As long as the liquor holds out," Hendricks said.

"And the pretty girls don't," Michelson said. And he looked at Maria in a distorted, veiled obviousness.

"Anyway," Comden said, "you alone have persisted, Major, overcome every obstacle; and now they're going

to send you out there only because you've earned damn near anything you ask for from the service. You've done it. But why? Good Lord, why? Why haven't you married Maria and settled down to a pleasant and sane life, like everybody else? *Why*, Henry? That's the question—"

The rage, which Hendricks had never thought about as possibly fear, exploded up through the length of his body. He was aware that it was more than rage—something unpleasant, to say the least—buried just below the threshold of consciousness. Why not marry Maria? Why not take one of those nice glass service mansions, more fabulous than the hanging gardens of Babylon, and raise kids in the quiet contented atmosphere of the new era? Why not? Why not indeed why not?

Always conscious of Michelson's libidinous attitude toward Maria, still at this moment Hendricks' tolerance dissolved in pink acid; he heard the faint, far thud, felt the pain in his arm, and Michelson was lying on the floor, still grinning cynically as he dabbled at his split lip.

Hendricks felt his eyes fixed on the blood strangely, then he was sick.

His voice choked. "All of you get the hell out! The party's over!"

So they moved from him slowly, not veiling sadness that was even a kind of pity.

"Get out!" Hendricks yelled hoarsely. "The party's over! Stay here in this sick green paradise of Earth and rot. Stay here in your great big global nursery, kiddies, and play with one another!"

"Wait—" Comden said and raised his hand.

"Get out!" Hendricks yelled, louder and louder. "Make this the farewell party. Goodbye! Farewell, old comrades in each other's arms!"

They filtered like dimming light into the hall, and the helicars started purring on the gravhook landing that en-

circled the apartment building. Guide-beams hummed as the automatic pilots prepared themselves.

SHE WAS dragging at Hendricks and he pushed her violently to the wall. "You too, baby," he said softly. "You're not in this either. Thanks for trying."

"But, honey—but Henry—let me—"

"You'd keep on saying I was crazy for wanting to do this thing. And then at the last minute, you'd be a martyr and go it with me. But then what? You don't belong out there any more than any of the rest of these soft-bellied dogs!"

How thin her face was suddenly, and shadowed with the dark worry of lonely and frustrated and humiliating years. She touched his hand. "I don't care how wrong you've gotten all the other things, honey. I only care about how you're wrong about me."

She moved back then and he almost moved toward her—as he had almost done many times before. He didn't; he never had. He started closing the door panel. Then suddenly, shockingly to Hendricks, she kicked savagely at the door and screamed at him.

"You've been lucky, you think," she said bitterly. "You've had everything. Handsome, a hero. You've had me the way you wanted me, any time. That would have been all right; I'd have been happy, never marrying you, knowing you were afraid, a scared kid. I would have been happy, honey. You made me feel like somebody. But it's over, and you did it, so thanks."

"Don't mention it, baby," he whispered. "Especially, don't scream it."

"You've had everything you wanted, honey, except yourself."

He slammed the door, turned the lights off, and stood in the starshine that flooded silver over the glass-paned wall. He could see the giant silver heliocar bugs of the night, whirling across the moon.

And then he saw Maria's small red sports job, and that was last to go.

"Goodbye, baby," he said. And for a moment he felt sad. But other things of thought that might afflict him frightened him and he stopped thinking. Why, he had almost thought, was it so nice suddenly—now that everyone was gone and the door was closed so tight against them? He almost thought about how it could be that—all during the years, in spite of the ritualistic acts—he'd never really been with Maria. But these, and so many other things he had almost thought about so many times before, he again did not think about now.

He liked being here alone. He didn't have to drink when he was alone.

At the window, he looked up.

But would it be so up there in the last great silence? In those interstellar silences that the psyche boys said could only, for a human mind, be wastelands of pain and loneliness and inevitable crackup?

He went to bed knowing he had seen the last of them, his buddies, relatives, friends, mild acquaintances. No more Maria; no more longing unfulfilled.

In the morning it was his day and he walked along the walkramps toward Central Headquarters in Washington.

Monkeys had been up there and returned; rats had survived. Men never had been able to take it, and finally they didn't care anymore and stopped dying for it. Meteors. Tempests of radiations; extremes of heat and cold; acceleration and deceleration tearing the weak inner organs from their feeble moorings.

And then, anyway, the enthusiasm waned. Men, who could adapt to anything, solve anything, go anywhere, do anything, no longer cared about the stars.

Only Hendricks cared.

Only one man left who cared about the stars.

Maybe there were others scattered through the apathy. But for him, the conditions were fortunate. He had authority, prestige, seniority, high rank; he'd been able to push himself through against terrific odds.

Well, this was the day. Even for him, the man who was going out there, the man who had pushed it against every conceivable obstacle, the way of his going was still a mystery.

Why, he thought as he walked over the city of the land of the world he would probably never see again, was so much withheld from him?

COMMANDER BURTON, Chief of Biological Research, and several other allied branches, looked at Hendricks for at least two minutes before he got up and went to the window. He was thin and delicate and meditative, but so cold, detached. "Take a good look, Major," Burton said. "You won't be seeing it again."

"I could come back."

"You could."

"Anyway, I've seen it all."

Burton shrugged. He didn't look sad or remonstrative, or anything like that; he didn't care. Hendricks had always liked him because he never seemed to care.

Burton said casually, "It'll take some time to prepare you, Major. Quite a while—"

Hendricks jumped up. "What's that? Some time? I've been waiting for some time. This was supposed to be the day!"

"It is," Burton said. "But a flight into space doesn't start with the ship blasting hydrogen flames. It starts—" he hesitated and pressed at his stomach and his heart and his head—"in here."

Hendricks felt a slight tremor in his knees. And in his stomach where Burton said a space flight really started, a

pool of ice-water seemed to form. "All right," he whispered. "What do you mean, Burton? I pushed this thing through impossible channels and I got an okay. I signed away myself and gladly. Who has anything to lose? Why in hell don't we get started?"

"We *are* getting started."

"I've had to do everything from beginning to end. Nobody was interested—"

"Not entirely true," Burton said. "Purely from an experimental point of view, we've always wanted to send a man out into space. Not that it's necessary, but the results would be of some clinical interest. We had to know for certain of someone who really wanted to go, whose psychological reasons were sound—even though hidden from himself. And the better reasons for that. It's a funny thing, Major, but you're the only one."

"I know that!" Hendricks shouted. "And here I am. This is the day, and I'm ready! I've been ready for a year, waiting, waiting. A lot longer than that! Now you give me a song and dance about getting ready! I am ready—"

"Psychologically," Burton nodded. "Physically, you have to be prepared."

"No one can take more G's than I can! You know that! If any man can take a blast-off, I can—"

"That's just it," Burton said. His eyes weren't looking at Hendricks, but at the wall. "Monkeys, rats, yes. But men can't take it, that's for sure."

Hendricks took a deep breath. "All right," he finally said. "What do you mean? And whatever you mean, why haven't I been in on it before this?"

"The process wasn't perfected, now it is. So now, Major, you'll be in on it."

Burton came back to his desk and picked up the phone. "Martin, is the lab ready for Major Hendricks?"

He nodded and dropped the receiver. "Let's go over to the lab now,

Major, and you can be in on it."

Hendricks turned Burton around. "I don't care what it is. All I want to know is—how long will it take?"

Burton hesitated. He had never obviously hesitated before. "A year."

Burton's face began to blur slightly like something seen distorted through watered glass. Hendricks felt the man's hand on his shoulder.

"But it won't matter, Major, believe me. Time won't have any meaning like that to you. There's too much anesthetizing necessary; time will resemble a dream."

Hendricks didn't say anything then. He wondered what it was he was feeling somewhere deep that stirred his heart and swelled his throat.

"Have you settled up everything thoroughly, Major? Said goodbye to your friends, and so forth?"

"Yes."

"Then why not just consider your flight as beginning today?" Burton opened the door. "A year, more or less, won't matter to you." He turned, holding the door open for Hendricks. "Will it, Major?"

Hendricks had to admit that it wouldn't. Or that it shouldn't. He thought about it on the way down in the elevator to the big labs, trying to figure how it ever could.

And it never did.

It was like a quick nap that somehow seems long but you know it isn't, and you dream complex, involved dreams that makes the false duration bearable, and often times pleasant.

Only when Hendricks woke up, and knew he was awake, it was still a dream, and the pleasantest dream of all.

He wasn't really one of men anymore. Perhaps in a purely symbolic sense he represented the spirit of *Man*. He was something that could stand to get alive into space, and once there stay alive indefinitely.

Oh—he would die there too if he

stayed long enough perhaps, but it would take a lot longer for him to die than if he had been still one of men.

He had known what was coming. And now that he no longer really was capable of knowing in his former capacity, he was happy.

COMMANDER BURTON was there when the spaceship blasted off, and was no longer distinguishable from the stars of night that received it without question. He stood by the big window and watched it disappear.

"No one will follow you, Hendricks. You're the last of your kind. And where's the heroic concepts of this moment they used to dream about, Major? Your motive is fear, the old fears that most have lost."

Burton smiled thinly to show that he didn't really care. "Fear, Major. Fear of too much complexity, of no identity, fear of obligations, and—" Again for the second time that he could remember, he noticeably hesitated. "And what else, Hendricks? Fear of the awful challenge of a bounded life that no longer offers neurotic frontiers into which to flee?"

He sat down at his desk and straightened some papers which he scarcely saw. "Running away, Major. The last escapist, and the final escape."

He switched off the light and sat there in the starshine filtering through the panes. And if he really cared, now only the moon could see.

And somewhere beyond the orbit of Saturn, beyond the Black Planet, the ship was a speck in the immensity that has no end, and after a while Hendricks remembered no beginning.

His eyes were closed in that basic kind of sleep from which there is no compulsion to awake. His body was curled up, foetus-like, in its shock-

[Turn To Page 95]

In science-fiction, one of the many things an author can do is to take an established trend and carry it on to extremities. Such stories are rarely good prophecy, since they cannot foresee other developments of the future which are most likely to modify the trend with which they are dealing. But such stories make good reading nonetheless, and can be delightfully unpleasant — as in the present instance.

AUDIENCE REACTION

by Robert F. Young

(illustrated by Paul Orban)

While the first mass-produced telempathy sets represented a tremendous step in the evolution of mass-media, they were handicapped by a number of serious technical flaws. It is one of the paradoxes of our civilization that those very flaws led to a form of art which remains unparalleled, even to this day. The first sets, for example, while they were able to focus the fictitious background and general narrative trend of the sensual, proved inadequate in the more exacting field of characterization. The participator had to fill in the characters himself, give them names, and supply them with sufficient detail to bring them to life. (Virgith's "All The World's A Stage"; p. 23)



HE MESMERIZER whirled faster and faster. It became a wild kaleidoscope, a vertiginous swirl of interblended colors. There was the usual transitory blankness that preceded identification, then—

He was an escaped prisoner. He was somewhere in the deserted section of the City of the Red Sands, Mars. His name was— His name was—

Richard Forrester!

He relived a brief flashback: he had been born on Earth. Not long after the death of his mother, his father had been convicted of illegal experimenta-

tion and sentenced to the Martian penal colony for life. His father had fled to the moon, taking the boy with him, and found sanctuary with the Interworld Scientist League in their Leibnitz mountain fortress.

When he was twenty, he was captured in the same encounter with the Interplanetary Police that cost his father's life, and sentenced to ten years in the Martian penal colony. He served three of those years without hope in the grim labor-camps of the Red Sands sector. At the end of the third year, the underground agents of the League finally located him. Then he had undergone six months of surreptitious pre-escape conditioning, and had waited six more for the exacting details of his escape to be arranged.

The desert was still vivid in his memory. The desert at night, with the searchbeams of the alerted guard-cruisers stalking whitely all around him, the ventral guns waiting impatiently above him, eager to speak their short staccato sentences. He had run wildly through the night to the deserted outskirts of the city, and he had pounded through the silent labyrinth of streets to the intersection where his contact was supposed to meet him. And the intersection had been empty—as utterly empty as he had become, standing all alone in the yellow light of



Forrester saw the ferret raise his arm and study a small, luminescent object attached to his wrist . . .

the corner streetlight.

He cowered now in the shadows of the corner building, out of range of the light, clinging stubbornly to the hope that his contact might still show up. His bitterness surfeited him. *Four years*, he thought. *Four years with nothing but a promise to keep me alive. And now they've broken the promise!*

The facades of the ugly tenements loomed on either side of the street. The hollow windows were blurs of blackness in the pale darkness of the night. Through the broken banks of the rooftops he could see a ragged river of sky and stars.

He shuddered, wondered how long he had to live.

He was safe enough for the moment. The guard-cruisers could not leave the desert; Interplanetary Law not only forbade their loosing their guns into an alien city; it also forbade their even approaching an alien city beyond a designated perimeter. The alarm, of course, had gone out to the Interplanetary Police, and very shortly he was going to have the ferrets to deal with. But in the labyrinthine streets and alleys of the tenement-section, he could elude them for a long time; with luck he could elude them altogether.

Richard Forrester began to feel better. He stood up straighter in the shadows. He felt the hard, sinewy strength of his young body. He remembered his marvelous condition—the result of

four years of hard labor in the desert prison-camps. He felt so good that he almost shouted with joy when he saw the prow of the levitator-car nose into the yellow circle of the street light. They had kept their promise after all! Then, beyond the prow, he saw the scarlet crested helmet of the Interplanetary Police, and the malevolent glitter of the ferret's eyes beneath it.

He shrank back, flattening his body against the warped siding of the building. It was unbelievable. The ferret *couldn't* be there; there simply had not been time enough for any police-force, no matter how efficient, to scour an entire section of a city and unerringly track down one single individual.

Then he saw the ferret raise his arm and study a small, luminescent object attached to his wrist. That was when Richard Forrester remembered—

Remembered his I. E. P.

HE LEANED limply against the building, felt the sudden coldness of his perspiring body. He smelled the Martian desert smell, dry and faintly flavored with oasis spices, coming in on the light cool wind. He thought: *I should have let the guard cruisers get me. It would have been easier, dying out there on the desert... This is a hell of a hole to have to die in. This is a hell of a way to have to die....*

The system of recording and indexing the individual emotional-patterns of criminals resembled, fundamentally, the obsolete system of fingerprinting, and was nearly infallible for the same reason fingerprinting had once been infallible: no two individuals possessed the same pattern. But the scope of I. E. P. detection went far beyond simple identification; far beyond merely establishing a person's guilt by means of certain idiosyncrasies in his emotional behavior.

For an individual not only possessed

a singular emotional pattern: he transmitted it also. Unconsciously, of course—and, in the case of fugitives, unwillingly. But as long as he lived he transmitted it without respite, whether he slept, worked, loved, or played. That much had been common knowledge for a long time before the detector was devised. It had been impracticable knowledge, but with the advent of the detector it instantly became the most effective weapon any police had ever possessed.

With the I. E. P. of the quarry a known factor the ancient game of Cops and Robbers became the regenerated game of Hide the Thimble. The quarry was the thimble and the ferrets, their detectors attuned to the quarry's I. E. P., were the searchers. A simple graduation of numerals on the detector-dial informed them whether they were "hot" or "cold." Since the device functioned effectively up to a maximum radius of two kilometers, once the I. E. P. of the quarry was picked up within that limit his chances for survival were negligible. There was one way, and only one way, for him to escape: he had to alter his I. E. P.

And there was only one way to alter an I. E. P.

Richard Forrester's pre-escape conditioning had paved the way for that. His contact was to have consummated it. His contact! he thought bitterly. His idealized blue-eyed contact! His long-limbed, lovely, *deus ex machina* of a contact who couldn't fulfill the single function she had been specifically conditioned for! Then he was astounded. For instead of the hatred and resentment his thoughts should have provoked he felt only tenderness, and a strong proclivity toward forgiveness once an excuse—any excuse would do—were offered for her lateness.

He was even imbued with a new will to live, to find his contact. The two were synonymous. He began to think

more clearly. First he had to find his contact; more accurately, he had to remain alive till his contact found him. He knew that the League would never deliberately desert him; that if his contact had failed to meet him as planned there must have been an excellent reason why.

THE FERRET had finished studying his detector. Shadows softened the lean brutality of his oddly-familiar face but Richard Forrester could feel those cold, implacable eyes. Presently the levitator-car began to inch forward out of the light and into the shadows.

Forrester edged his body carefully along the tenement-front. When he came to the rachitic porch he rolled over upon it, and crawled to the door. His extended fingers touched the rotten wood of the sill, then the warped panels. He pushed tentatively, praying that it was not locked, that the rusty hinges would not squeak. The door swung inward soundlessly and he crawled over the threshold. He straightened and swung the door shut just as the ferret, anticipating the garish finale of the hunt, switched on his dual search-beams and drenched the street with glaring light.

He waited, leaning against the door, till his eyes had accustomed themselves to the darkness. Directly before him he made out the darker blur of a spiral stairway. Cautiously he began to ascend it. He paused at each landing, listening. Quiet cloyed the corridors and the empty tiers of rooms. Presently he discerned the pale darkness of the sky showing through a square aperture in the roof and he hastened his steps.

He had reached the top landing before he saw the silhouette. Simultaneously he heard the relieved sigh: "It's really you!" Without pausing he leaped up the intervening steps, grasped the figure in the aperture and dragged a surprisingly yielding body

down beside him. Then, when he felt the softness of a woman, he dropped his arms in consternation.

"I'm here to help you!" she said.

He was still too dumbfounded to speak.

"Darling, don't you understand? I'm your contact!"

Her hand found his in the darkness. She led the way and he followed willingly, up the stairs to the roof. Her levitator-car was a tapered blur in the starlight. They hurried toward it. When they reached it she stopped and faced him.

Her bobbed hair was the exact shade of blonde he had known it would be and her face was just as he had visualized it. He could not see the color of her eyes but he knew they must be blue.

His contact! There was a tightness in his chest, a slow throbbing in his temples.

Her voice was husky. "Darling," she said, "did you forget? You're supposed to kiss me."

Another flaw which seriously handicapped the first T.E. sets was their inability to attain cross-sexual identification. Fundamental physical conformity is prerequisite in rudimentary empathia-existence. When the lead-character of a sensual is male, the male participator alone can integrate himself; the female participator is unaffected. She is unable, even temporarily, to abnegate her own sex and become a member of the opposite. Consequently, even in the early sensuels, we find the intriguing formula which (while it was originally devised to circumvent the flaw) proved so popular that it has been retained to this day: two provocative lead-characters, each of equal importance to the story, one of them male, the other female; and the double narrative progressing along parallel lines, the lines merging whenever possible and parting only when necessary, always coming ultimately together to achieve the standard empathia-ending.

(Virgith's "All The World's A Stage"; p. 23-4)

THE MESMERIZER whirled faster and faster. It became a wild

kaleidoscope, a vertiginous swirl of interblended colors. There was the usual transitory blankness that preceded identification, then—

She was an agent of the Interworld Scientist League. She was in the downtown section of the City of the Red Sands, Mars. Her name was— Her name was—

Rhonda Forrester!

She relived a brief flashback: after her mother's death, she had spent a lonely childhood in her father's crumbling mansion near the ruins of Chicago. She remembered her father as a vague little man who spent nearly all of his time in the laboratory. She remembered the day the Interplanetary Police had come. She saw her father shuffling down the stairs to meet them. She saw him stop, bewildered, and then she saw him become a brief flaming pyre before the light-lances of the ferrets.

She could not recall how long she had remained in the house, silently screaming; there was a gray blank in her memory. Following the blank was the warm remembrance of the luxurious underground-fortress of the League and of the kind people who had rehabilitated her. Then there was the memory of the absorbing years spent at espionage school.

A year ago she had begun training for her first assignment, and nine months later she had arrived in the City of the Red Sands on her first mission. She had lost track of the long slow days awaiting her alert—and then, when her alert finally had come through, it had been late and her mission, precarious at best, now verged on the impossible.

She cursed the heavy downtown traffic. Her foresight in selecting the fifth level permitted her to move along at a semblance of speed, but she could not attain even half the velocity she needed to reach her rendezvous on time.

She glared at the clouds of levitator-

cars surrounding her. Some were so close they nearly touched the sleek sides of her Sky Dream special.

Of all the times to get my alert! she thought. Just when every snivelling little Martian in the city is poking home from work! She knew, of course, that the escape had been planned with the homebound traffic as an integral factor, but the knowledge only infuriated her further. If the traffic had been part of the plan, then double care should have been taken to alert her on time.

Gradually, the cars began thinning out around her and she breathed more freely. She risked rising to the sixth level and swiftly devoured three blocks before the crimson headlights of a fire-launch forced her back to the fifth. Grudgingly, she readjusted her speed.

Below her, the neon arteries of the city straggled out into thinner and thinner capillaries. The clouds of cars dwindled to an occasional suburban commuter. Tentatively she exceeded the fifth level limit, then doubled it. The Sky Dream soared through the deepening night. The cool wind eddied around her, bringing the exotic scent of Martian desert-oasis to her nostrils. Her anger subsided before the sheer enchantment of the adventure. The industrial district rushed up, then flowed swiftly past beneath her; and presently, far ahead, she could discern the ramshackle jungle of the tenement-section. Finally she cut her lights and drifted over the jumbled rooftops.

SHE RETAINED altitude only long enough to orient herself, then descended slowly to street level. The Sky Dream came to rest on rough pavement in the dark interval between two wan street lights. There was the brief grating sound of contact, and then silence. Complete, terrifying silence. Rhonda Forrester shuddered. She had visited the section a dozen times, familiarizing herself with its eve-

ry street and alley, but she had always come during the day. It had never occurred to her that night could make such a demoralizing difference.

She noted her position on her eidetic map and calculated how far she had to go to reach the contact point. Then she looked at the luminous dial of her I. E. P. detector. The indicator registered 79.6. She took a deep breath. The distance checked; therefore the fugitive must be at the contact point now. But, more important, the mere fact that the indicator registered at all proved beyond doubt that he was still alive.

He was probably waiting for her, she thought excitedly. Impatiently waiting. Angrily waiting. She could feel the accelerated pounding of her heart, her mind seeing him tall and strong, and dark from the desert sun; his gray eyes alert for the slightest movement in the shadows; crouching like a splendid beast at bay, ready to spring like a Martian desert-cat upon the first unwary ferret to come his way. And then, returning to reality, she remembered that all ferrets carried light-lances and loved to use them, and that if anything even remotely resembling a Martian desert-cat were to spring out of the darkness at them, they would coldly and efficiently incandesce it.

She lifted the Sky Dream a short distance above street-level, accelerating as much as she dared. She followed her eidetic map, twisting and turning through the labyrinthine streets. At intervals she cast anxious glances at her detector, willing it not to drop irrevocably to zero. When she reached the street she wanted the indicator registered 88.1.

She knew then that he must be very close, for the dial was only calibrated up to 100. 100 was maximum intensity—attainable only through actual contact.

Far down the street she could see the lonely street-light illuminating the intersection. But there was no sign of

movement around it; no sign of life. Her heart slowed. He *had* to be there!

She started moving toward the light. Her indicator climbed steadily. 90, 91. She was almost to the intersection, when she saw the other car moving at right angles to her own. At first her eyes rejected the sight. It was too cruel to be true. Then, when she saw the hateful scarlet crest of the ferret, she braked desperately, and swerved into the shadows of the corner building.

For awhile she could not function at all. She could only sit there numbly, staring at the oddly familiar figure of the ferret. As she watched, the ferret finished studying his detector, raised his eyes and coldly regarded the street before him.

SHE HAD failed her mission. The words arranged themselves condemningly in her mind. They flashed on and off, like a vindictive neon sign. She had let the ferrets get between her and the fugitive. She, the key figure, the only person in the system who embodied just the right physical properties to scramble the fugitive's I. E. P.; the only person who could save his life. She felt sick. For a moment she felt like giving up, like waiting there in the street till the exultant sirens of the ferrets announced that the hunt was over; till the tiny indicator of her detector dial dropped to zero.

But only for a moment. Then her training reasserted itself. She drew her light-lance, but before she could focus it the ferret had set his craft in motion. In an instant the shadows had engulfed him; in another he had disappeared beyond the corner building.

Rhonda Forrester swore. Then she touched the controls and the Sky Dream began to rise slowly. She was impatient, but she realized that a gradual movement in the darkness would be less noticeable than an abrupt one, and she did not doubt for a moment that there were other ferrets in the vicinity. Her best chance, she knew,

lay in gaining the roof. From there she might be able to hold the ferrets off till the fugitive got clear. And if he did not get clear, she would at least be in an excellent position to avenge him.

Halfway up she checked her detector. The indicator still registered 91. She was puzzled. The count should have receded, since the distance between them had to increase with each millimeter she gained in altitude. It didn't figure at all.

When she was level with the roof she checked the detector again. The indicator had not moved. She drifted over the coping and brought the Sky Dream down on the roof. She sat in the control seat, breathing hard, watching the indicator desperately. She willed it to recede, willed it to behave normally. The indicator perversely climbed to 91.1. Then, raising her eyes and examining the roof, she made out the dark blur of the aperture, and a realization of what might be happening flooded her, leaving her nearly exhausted with relief, and aflame with sudden, delirious anticipation.

She left the car and crept over to the aperture. She looked down into the throat of the stairwell. The darkness was impenetrable. But there was a reassuring sound of nearing footsteps. Her breath came faster. Her fingers clutched the frame of the aperture, sinking into the soft rotten wood.

Presently she saw the vague outline of him, and then she made out the familiar contours of his broad shoulders, the familiar line of his neck and head. That was when he looked up and saw her.

"It's really you!" she sighed.

She saw him leap up the intervening stairs and she felt his hands grasp her waist. She permitted herself to be dragged through the aperture, into the darkness of the stairwell. Then she heard his indrawn breath and felt his hands fall away from her.

"I'm here to help you!" she said...

"Darling, don't you understand? I'm your contact!"

She found his hand in the darkness and led the way up the stairs to the roof. The Sky Dream was a tapered blur in the starlight. They hurried towards it. When they reached it she stopped and faced him.

His hair was dark and curly just as she had known it would be and his face was just as she had visualized it. She could not see the color of his eyes but she knew they must be gray.

There was a tightness in her chest, a slow throbbing in her temples.

Her voice was husky. "Darling," she said, "did you forget? You're supposed to kiss me."

Empatha-existence encompasses all the senses: auditory, visto, olfactory, tactile, and kinesthetic. In a modern sensual, this involvement is not injurious, for modern sensuels are made with the Three Ideals (Relaxation, Enjoyment and Sex) continually in mind. Unfortunately, there was no ideology behind the first sensuels. While they did accentuate sex, they were made primarily to thrill their audience—to imbue them with a sense of romantic adventure.

In this connection, an interesting parallel can be drawn between early TV and early TE. The former repeated the blood-and-thunder western-sagas of the 2-D's, while the latter repeated the blood-and-thunder space-sagas of the 3-D's.

Obviously the first participators were unable to endure a full hour of such involvement without some respite. It is not surprising, therefore, that the first sensuels were broken up into four ten minute sequences. Neither is it surprising that the intervals between those sequences were utilized for commercial purposes.

(Virgith's "All The World's A Stage"; p. 36-7)

"WE WILL return to 'Hide The Thimble' in just a few moments," the caressing voice in their suddenly-empty minds said. "In the meantime there will be a few important words from our sponsor..."

Richard Forrester stood up. "I can stand a drink," he said. "Anybody second the motion?"

"I'll say," Rhonda Forrester said. "I'll help you mix them," Anita Esmond said, getting up and following him into the kitchen.

He got the liquor and glasses from the cupboard, and she got the seltzer and ice cubes from the refrigerator. He lined up the glasses on the white kitchen table and she plunked an ice cube into each of them. He caught her eyes as he was pouring the liquor. "How about a special just for us?" he asked.

"Okay," she said.

He got two more glasses and poured them one third full. "Straight?"

"You're the doctor."

They raised their drinks, looking at each other. "Here's to us," Anita Esmond said.

They clinked glasses.

"Hurry up!" Rhonda Forrester called from the living room. "The commercial's almost over."

They set their empty glasses down and carried the drinks into the darkened living room. They resumed their seats on the twelve foot divan before the TE set.

Everyone drank hurriedly.

"And now back to 'Hide The Thimble'," the announcer's voice crooned. . .

Since the participator invariably identified himself with the main character of the sensual, the other characters became people he knew—people he liked or disliked, depending on whether they abetted or obstructed the solution of the problem. This reaction intensified the already-violent objections of the old-school psychologists. The participator, they warned, by identifying the characters with the incorrect real people (a husband, for example, identifying the heroine with his neighbor's wife and vicariously realizing his latent desires) would become less and less integrated in his real existence and eventually become incapable of accepting reality at all.

Virgith's "All The World's A Stage"; p. 51)

ANITA ESMOND'S voice was husky. "Darling," she said, "did you forget? You're supposed to kiss me."

Richard Forrester's pre-escape conditioning had prepared him perfectly: his emotional pattern stood at maximum susceptibility. Everything dissolved around him except the star-lit figure of the woman whose image had been implanted in his mind a year ago; who had become for him the incarnation of both life and love. He took her into his arms. He felt the soft pliancy of her tall body and in a blinding climax he discovered the cool hotness of her lips.

There was a violent shift in his emotional pattern as it readjusted itself to embrace a force it had never experienced before: the overwhelming force of Love. . . .

Then he heard the grating of the levitator-car upon the coping. He whirled, trying to shield the girl's body with his own. The ferret was standing up in the control-seat and for the first time—as the indentification completely resolved itself—Richard Forrester recognized the familiar hateful features. Then he flinched before the bright rapier of the light-charge. Its closeness seared his cheek. Behind him a tindery tenement leaped into sudden flaming brightness.

Anita Esmond had her own light-lance focused by then. He saw the thin bright rapier reach out and touch the ferret. He saw the ferret become the shrieking flame-etched caricature of John Esmond, topple grotesquely from the control seat of the still rising car and fall flaming into the street below.

He felt Anita Esmond's hand tightly gripping his arm. He heard her words, "Quick! My apartment. It's the only place in the city where we'll be safe!" He followed her into the Sky Dream and they rose together into the cool, star-sequined night.

Below them the flames began their crackling repast of tenements. . . .

RHONDA FORRESTER'S voice was husky. "Darling," she said,

"did you forget? You're supposed to kiss me."

Her conditioning had prepared her perfectly: she was ready to respond with the maximum intensity needed to consummate the first phase of her assignment. Everything dissolved around her except the starlit figure of John Esmond, whose image had been implanted in her mind a year ago; who had become for her the incarnation of both life and love. She found herself in his arms, scarcely able to breathe. Then, in a blinding climax, she discovered the crushing warmth of his lips.

And she knew that his emotional-pattern was violently shifting, readjusting itself to embrace a force it had never experienced before: the overwhelming force of Love...

Then she heard the grating of the levitator-car upon the coping. She whirled, her right hand dropping instinctively to her belt, her fingers curling around the hilt of her light-lance. The ferret was standing up in the control seat and for the first time—as the identification completely resolved itself—Rhonda Forrester recognized the familiar hateful features. Then she flinched before the bright rapier of the light-charge. Its closeness seared her cheek. Behind her a tindery tenement leaped into sudden flaming brightness.

She focused her own light-lance. She saw the thin bright rapier reach out and touch the ferret. She saw the ferret become the shrieking flame-etched caricature of Richard Forrester, topple grotesquely from the control seat of

the still rising car and fall flaming into the street below.

She gripped John Esmond's arm. "Quick!" she said. "My apartment. It's the only place in the city where we'll be safe!" She stepped into the Sky Dream and he crowded in beside her. They rose together into the cool, star-sequestered night.

Below them the flames began their crackling repast of tenements...

The old-school psychologists were mistaken about a number of things, and their absurd prognosis of the effect of the sensual upon the mass-audience is merely another example of their bungling attempts to understand humanity. Their perspective was hopelessly warped by the rigid reality of their day.

The ancient conception of reality seems fantastic in retrospect. It is difficult to believe that reality could ever have been arbitrarily confined to the narrow field of objective perception. For there are realities, and realities; and there are valid only in ratio to the intensity of the pleasure with which they are experienced. If the "simulated" reality transcends the "actual" reality, then the "simulated" reality is more valid than the "actual" reality—and justifiably enjoys a higher calibration on our scale of values.

The old reality was little more than a fixation, a stubborn precept forced upon mankind by successive generations of pseudo-intelligentsia. It is a part of the jetsam of our culture. It is an obsolete word and has no more meaning to our civilization than "Wife," "Husband," "Love," "Honor," or "Friend."

(Virgith's "All The World's A Stage"; P. 51-2; Decadence Literature Files, Reintegration Center #12, New America, Earth)



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January issue of

A Gripping Novelet of the Day After Tomorrow THE FINAL FIGURE

by Sam Merwin, Jr.

DYNAMIC SCIENCE FICTION

The Stars in their Courses (continued from page 51)

sulting analyses were given to nine persons who knew the five subjects well, and who rated each statement in each analysis for correctness and compared each analysis with a previous character-analysis that, it was agreed, gave a truthful picture of the man.

About 6% of the astrologers' statements proved significantly right, which is well within what should be expected by simple luck. Since there was not the slightest indication that the astrologers had learned anything about the subjects from the birth data, Bobertag concluded reasonably that astrology was merely "a gentle flow of ink."

Of course, astrologers from Claudius Ptolemy down protest that it doesn't disprove astrology to show that astrologers err—for don't physicians, meteorologists, etc. make mistakes, too? The question, however, is not whether astrologers ever err at all, but whether they come nearer correct analyses and predictions by their horoscopes than they would by simply shutting their eyes and guessing.

Thus astrology fails as a science on all counts. Its basic assumptions are illusory: when a planet "rises" it isn't really going "up", for there is no "up" out in space; the earth is turning towards the other planet. The sky consists of nothing but empty space; a pair of planets in "conjunction" are really millions of miles apart. Far from being occult, the planets are mere balls of minerals, sending us minute amounts of light and heat (reflected from the sun) and pulling us about a tiny bit by gravitational attraction, but otherwise affecting us not at all. The astrologers' "planetary rays" or "vibrations" have never made the needle of any instrument quiver; and, finally, statistics show that astrology produces no more reliable results than simple guesswork.

What, then, keeps astrology going?

For one thing, its impressive apparatus of fascinating symbols, mysterious charts, and abstruse calculations lend it a spurious similitude of science, which many simple souls cannot tell from the real thing. Astrologers are also experts at telling people what they want to hear. Who doesn't like to be told that "You are the masterful, high-minded type"? Of whom isn't it true that "Opportunity appeals to you most when it gives you a chance to show your special abilities"?

Finally, the smart astrologer so hedges his predictions that no matter what happens he can argue that he was right. In just the same way, a couple of thousand years ago, when King Croesus of Lydia asked the Oracle of Delphi whether to go to war with the Persians, the oracle told him that "if he warred on the Persians, he would destroy a great realm." He did, and he did: his own. But the oracle had a perfect excuse: she hadn't specified *which* realm. And our modern diviners still understand the art of the eloquently ambiguous answer.

Finally, a common human weakness lies in the love of blaming one's own failures on events beyond one's control. It is soothing to be told that you've lost a job or a mate, not because of your own stupidity or weakness of character, but because of a great cosmic event such as a planetary conjunction.

Thus, although astrology does not furnish a reliable guide to the character or fortunes of men, and although its pretensions to science are false, it will probably continue for many years yet. For astrologers give their clients excuses for the past, praise for the present, and hope for the future; and for these, people will pay. It isn't logical, but then, if we always acted logically, the world would be a less interesting, though more orderly, place.



(continued from page 33)

uses them. There's no inherent magic in any of its systems which will insure them against mis-use, or automatically make a wise man out of a fool. If a person's general behaviour-pattern is of such a nature that we could accurately describe it as irrational, the odds are that he will try to use Null-A systems in the same manner as he has used other systems. However if his "foolishness" derives mainly from what Null-A followers term "semantic mal-adjustment"—if he talks and acts as if words were the things they are supposed to represent; as if high-level abstractions were on the same order as low-level abstractions; as if words about language were words about objects and events, etc.—then an understanding of Null-A might result in a decrease of folly.

These are just a few of the tenets of Null-A. The word is not the object or the event. Thousands of people reacted to a fictitious description of a "Martian invasion", back in 1938, as if it were a description of actual events. Many people react to the word "Communist" as if the word were the person who believes in Communism. "Negro" is a high-level abstraction—a

term employed to classify a large group of people; many react to John Doe as if everything they have read or heard about "the Negro" was a description of John Doe and his past, present, and probable-future behaviour.

All in all, Null-A has probably proven a disappointment to some who expected world-shaking results when the subject started to spread around the science-fiction movement in 1945, spearheaded by Van Vogt's amusing fantasy, "The World of Null-A". Those who were induced to look into the matter—and there seems to have been quite a number—probably discovered in short enough order that Van Vogt's comprehension of Null-A was superficial, at least as far as the story was concerned. (They may have learned later that the Null-A background was inserted into the story late; it had originally been plotted with a different philosophical gimmick.) Be that as it may, the story had a salutary effect, and since then a number of fine stories, employing Null-A have appeared. Jones' "Production Test", "I Tell You Three

[Turn To Page 86]

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Times", and "Son of the Stars" are examples. They are good examples, too, in that they don't drag in Null-A overtly; in the first story, one specific aspect of Null-A is mentioned; in the other two, there is no specification.

Which is all to the good; Null-A is designed for use—not just for name-plugging.

Introducing our authors, we have with us:

IRVING S. COX, JR., whose novel, "To Save A World" was a bell-ringer in the September *Future Science Fiction*; Cox was first seen in *Fantastic Adventures*, October 1952, with a short story, "In A Day of Victory".

SAM MERWIN, JR., veteran editor, and author of many kinds of fiction; as of this writing, he's assisting in the production of *Galaxy Science Fiction*.

ROBERT F. YOUNG, who made his debut in the June 1953 *Startling Stories*, with "The Black Deep Thou Wingest", a short story.

RAY EARL SCHMIDT, who appears here as a "first", with one of the most amusing yarns I've read in quite a while.

DAVID GRINNELL, who has been appearing quite frequently since *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* ran his short-short story, "Top Secret" in their issue of Fall, 1950.

CHARLES E. FRITSCH is another newcomer to our pages; he first appeared in the March 1951 issue of *Other Worlds*, with a story entitled, "The Wallpaper."

BRYCE WALTON, whose short story, "The Myth-Makers", received nearly universal acclaim, last issue, coming out in second place.

EANDO BINDER, who is our veteran scribe in this issue; originally a penname for the team of Andreas and Otto Binder, "Eando" is now Otto alone. The name first appeared on a short story entitled, "The First Martian"—*Amazing Stories*, October 1932.

[Turn To Page 88]

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SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY

Letters

GLAD, GLAD, GLAD

by Nan Warner

Dear RWL:

I'm glad—that you hear, glad, glad!—that you didn't corral any of your eager-beaver authors and have them write a story around the cover for the November issue. Maybe it was the kind of cover that sells the magazine, and I guess it wasn't too bad at that because it did catch my eye. But it sure was a relief *not* to find a story inside with that scene in it.

Have you stopped to check back over cover-stories? It might be a good idea, because I just did and here is what I found.

There was something called "Seeds of Insecurity" by Larry Shaw—that was the first, and it was your August 1951 issue. Well, the story was rather clever but it would have been lots lots better if he hadn't had to fit in that silly picture.

There was "Fugue" by Stephen Marlowe—that was quite good and it was done around an unusual cover.

There was "Intervention" by Michael Sherman—that was good too, and surprisingly so because the cover was pretty run-of-the-mill despite the flying city background.

There was "The Shining City", but the cover showed such an ordinary scene that I'll bet the story wasn't written around it at all. Or did you have the cover done from the story?

There was "Silent Partner" by S. A. Lombino—that was very good, and again it was a case of inspiration from an unusual cover scene, I'm sure.

Then we had three fair-to-middling covers, with stories that were all right but nothing special. I refer to "Defender of the Faith" by Alfred Coppel; "Escape Valve" by Charles Dye; and "The World She Wanted" by Philip K. Dick.

There was "Common Time" by James Blish—now that was the most striking and unusual cover you have ever run on SFQ and the story was equally striking and different.

But so far, only Michael Sherman has been able to do anything special with a run-of-the-mill cover.

Conclusion: have stories written around covers when the covers are really different or bizarre—otherwise don't bother. I'm sure we won't be missing much and we may be grateful for what we miss!

—Address withheld by request

[Turn To Page 90]

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SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY

Hmm, looks as if Nan has built up quite a case there. What say, readers?

TOO MUCH OF A MUCHNESS

by Jerry Candler

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

I wasn't one of the ones who were particularly in favor of the fan magazine review proposition and I meant to write in and vote against it in the first place. But since you threw them at us, I read them dutifully in the interests of fair play and all that.

Well, Cal Beck put his heart and soul into it by the looks of the department and the first batch wasn't too bad. But really, sir, when it got to page after page, and in small type too, it got to be much too much of a muchness. Maybe the fans loved it, but this reader found it awfully dull after a page or so. I'd much rather see a short-short in those pages because a lot of your short-shorts are very clever and make a good change of pace.

I see you have fan reviews in Madle's department now; well, so long as they're kept under control I don't mind. That department, "Inside Science Fiction" is okay by me because it's split up into various sections, and if I don't want to read one particular section I figure I won't be missing too much. I find most of the department interesting, and can't complain about a column or so of fan magazine reviews.

Your idea about wearing earmuffs to "It Came From Outer Space" hit me just right; in fact, doing that might help a lot of movies which aren't too bad to look at, but induce acute nausea when you can hear what is being said.

Let me add my compliments on that Ross cover; it was really tops.

—R. F. D., Rangeley, Maine

Truth to tell, the fan magazine reviews did get a fair amount of praise. It was the space situation that made me decide to drop them finally, however. While I want to please the fans where possible, I can't lose sight of the fact that we are selling fiction, first of all, and that the appeal of fan departments is extremely limited—in particular, fan magazine reviews. Any reader might be interested in a good article, but the returns showed that very few non-fan readers were interested in the review department as it was.

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BACKWARD PROGRESS

by W. F. Link

Mr. Lowndes:

Concerning your miserable Sept.-Nov. ish, (released Sept.-dated Nov.)—not that I can boast of reading SFQ regularly, but since I did acquire the mag at a 25¢ reduction, (people do pay for it?)—I did read it merely on the basis of the past reputation. Naturally I found it seriously reduced in size and quality from your last Sept.-Nov. which flaunted a whopping 132 p.p. and some reasonably supportable stories. But what matter,—dig those dandy clipped pages—(sarcasm) they more than compensate for the loss. I suspect that subsequently SFQ will improve in paper quality, go bi-monthly, and secure a better grade of sf and artists in the next 2 or 3 milennium. But then again SF bi-monthly doesn't sound very rhythmical or original. Considering your backward progress in the past year, I fear that it will be most of eternity before you graduate, at the bottom of the class. If you are to achieve success, you must unquestionably evolve the way of *Startling* which is now able to sneer at inferior mags and deny its pulpishness with reasonable confidence.

Your most noteworthy story, this ish, would send Mines' Ether literally exploding were it to appear in SS (God forbid). Of course I am referring to the short, "Mercury Bill and the Amorous Hunk." After reading it, I'd swear that Stearns is a pseudonym for Nelson Bond. The remainder of the lot is only so-so excepting "Curtain in the Sky," which is far below your par which is far below my par. Sorry, I was nurtured on good sf.

It is beyond comprehension that there are actually existing fans that find much amusement in your colorless pages (and pay for it too).

Which brings around another point worthy of blasting—your dull letter-column, which is comprised chiefly of babbling deadheads talking about nothing in particular, and other babbling deadheads whose sole function and occupation is lavishing praise blind to the facts—or is that just your editing? No hot and flaring discussions; no correspondence teeming with cynicism, which in turn provokes more accusations; which liven the letter-columns of other mags. Occasionally, however, some Canadian will provide the necessary stimulus—which usually goes unnoticed. Am referring, in this ish, to Mike W. Elm who, although not mentioning Heinlein's name, is entirely correct about the author's direct tendency to cream his stories over with a vociferous amount of mid 20th-century slang, which must be included due

[Turn Page]

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to the paucity of decent writing in most of his books.

Heinlein professes two chief writing-styles in adult sf—(1), his dragging slang style, heavily plastered over with detective-story dialogue and stereotyped characters. Ex: "The Old Man was quite capable of saying 'Boys, we need to fertilize this oak tree; jump in that hole at its base and I'll cover you up,'" and other such slop on the first page of the "Puppet Masters". And get that old man business. (2), the superior style, which nevertheless is not independent of slang and catch-phrases, and is usually based on big business or big organization like "The Man Who Sold the Moon."

"The Day After Tomorrow" is a cross between the first and the second, with dominant characteristics of the latter. Though Heinlein may display many divergent writing-techniques, they are all related in the respect that none show any great literary ability—which is a must, or should be a must, for someone of Heinlein's fame. His tale that deals with "moon huckstering" however, is by far his best, and most enjoyable, and certainly deserves all the praise his other books have manifested undeservingly.

—638 Foxcroft Road,
Elkins Park 14, Penna.

Hmm, so you feel that SFQ can still stand a little improvement, eh? Well, now, I agree with that—but how do I know that you know good science fiction when you see it? And as for printing letters of lavish praise—can I help it if that is about all we get? Usually, I have to cut the letters down a bit—we don't want the letter-department to get sticky with affection, you know—so it's a relief to get one like yours where I don't have to do any work.

I DOUBT IT

by Wallace McKinley

Dear RWL:

"Architect of Chaos" was, as you said, a very interesting story and perhaps it could have happened—but somehow I doubt it. I think I doubt it mostly because Danelaw didn't indicate any special mode of hypnotism outside of the familiar ones, and I wasn't convinced that post-hypnotic suggestion could either be that strong or last as long.

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[Turn To Page 94]

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SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY

into motion, but it can be calmed down when handled rightly and the semi-hypnotic suggestions reexamined in the light of reason.

I think the story would have been more impressive if the author had given more of an explanation than just "hypnotism" per se, if he'd thrown in some sort of plausible-sounding gimmick to account for the effectiveness of it.

—New Canaan, Conn.

There's such disagreement about what is and what is not possible in reference to hypnotism—even among those who have studied and worked with it—that it's hardly possible for a layman to have a clear picture.

ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR

by Willis Freeman

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

It was something of a shock to see the last issue of SFQ with the extra thickness gone but I'll have to admit that the magazine does look neater in its new size. Anyway, the best argument in favor is what you put into the pages you have, and for my money two stories in your November issue made me forget to count the number of pages.

So long as you can give us tales on the level of "The Irrationals" by Milton Lesser and "The Myth Makers" by Bryce Walton, I won't miss anything at all. And the most surprising thing is that these stories were by authors I never considered as out of the ordinary. They wrote good stories but nothing unusual.

I hear tell that the price of pulp paper has gone up this year and that partly accounts for the fact that many magazines—not only yours—have had to cut down their size.

But as I said before, so long as the quality keeps up I won't miss a bit of quantity.

—Skowhegan, Maine

You heard rightly: production costs have risen and keep rising far ahead of proportionate increase in readership. Now if every satisfied follower of SFQ could convert a new one. . .

A MATTER OF INTENT

by Jay Tyler

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

I'm not sure whether Gunn or Claeson or both make this point, but I go along with

IT SAYS HERE

the matter of intent when it comes to determining whether a story of past ages should be considered science fiction.

That would rule out such stories as Voltaire's "Micromegas", for although it tells about beings from beyond, the story is not concerned with science in relation to other worlds, or the effect of planetary visitors, but with social satire.

On the other hand, a story whose science is distinctly outdated, such as Verne's "From the earth to the Moon" belongs. Or take something like Bell's "Moon of Doom", which appeared in 1928. I don't know if the principles involved in Roche's limit were known at the time the story was written, but they are now, so that the story is obviously impossible. The intent, however, as you can see if you read the story, was very clearly one of realistic description according to the author's knowledge and understanding of scientific possibilities.

—127 East 28th Street, New York, NY

I'd say that the question of intent is definitely to be derived from Gunn, and possibly from Claeson as well. The latter certainly makes the point that obsolete scientific theory should not be grounds for denying the label of "science fiction" to a story which was clearly science fiction at the time of its writing.



THE LAST HERO

[Turn To Page 73]

proof liquid tank. This indeed was no wasteland of pain, loneliness, complexity, or regrets. The challenge of frightening unknowns was over for him—over for good.

Ten, a hundred, a thousand years, aeons. What did it matter to Hendricks? Nothing mattered to Hendricks anymore. He floated in his liquid, his body reconditioned to breath-liquid instead of air, to absorb nourishment from self-perpetuating liquid, an amniotic fluid, oxygen-bearing. It filled his loose, vulnerable body-cavities against the shaking shocks, and he was warm in it and safe.

Fifty years before, Hendricks had

[Turn Page]

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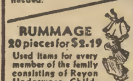
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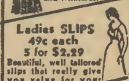
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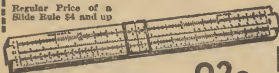
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floated in such a liquid, warm, protected from shock, fed, curled up in the soft dark fluid of gentle unawareness.

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Without beginning or end, in an eternal moment of contentment, Hendricks headed outward carrying the spirit of *Man* to the stars.



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1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Louis H. Silberkleit, 241 Church Street, New York 13, N.Y.; Editor, Robert W. Lowndes, 241 Church Street, New York 13, N.Y.; Managing editor, Robert W. Lowndes, 241 Church Street, New York 13, N.Y.; Business manager, Maurice Coyne, 241 Church Street, New York 13, N.Y.

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For the first time, we've managed to hammer out an issue wherein no voting reader disliked any of the stories; my rating sheet shows only black marks. Also, this is the first issue wherein all the voters rated every story.

This isn't necessarily a good thing; it might mean that the readers found this issue rather tepid, and while they didn't honestly dislike any of the stories, they didn't particularly enthuse over any of them, either. That's where those point-numbers can tell a story; when this is the case, the first-place and last-place ratings are so evenly-divided, that all the stories come out just about the same — very little difference in point-ratings. And since we had five stories last time, they all should have come out 3 point something were the response universally lukewarm.

Actually, only two stories other than the winner received first-place votes; a few readers liked "The Myth-Makers" or "Mercury Bill" better than the Lesser novelet.

The point-scores made them come out this way:

1. The Irrationals (Lesser)	1.85
2. The Myth-Makers (Walton)	2.71
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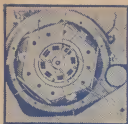
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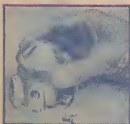
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